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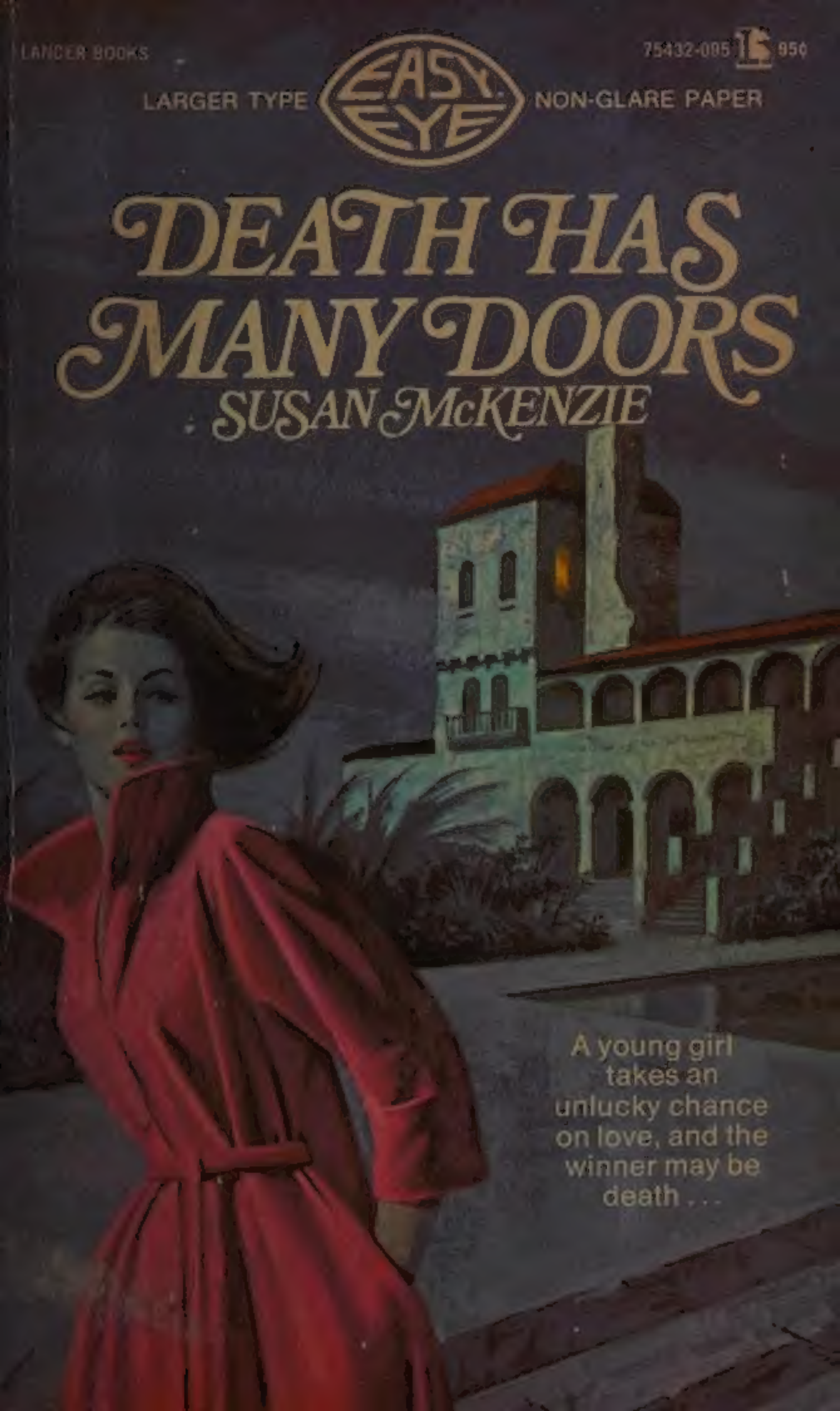
DEATH HAS MANY DOORS

SUSAN McKENZIE



A young girl takes an unlucky chance on love, and the winner may be death . . .

THE SMALL MENACE...

Hamilton stood up as Elizabeth picked up her robe. Something scurried, sideways and crablike, out from beneath it, and she screamed again. The scorpion scuttled across the floor, its tail curved up over its back, ready to strike.

"Oh, Hamilton, kill it, kill it," she sobbed.

Hamilton stepped forward calmly and brought his foot down on it. "Darling, I'm sorry you had to find that. What an ugly thing to happen on your first day," Hamilton said.

Elizabeth shuddered, wondering about the next day—and the next .

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SUSAN McKENZIE

LANCER BOOKS NEW YORK

A LANCER BOOK

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DEATH HAS MANY DOORS

CHAPTER ONE

Elizabeth Connover surveyed the small but pleasant living room of the cottage she had rented for the summer. White ruffled organdy curtains fluttered at the windows through which the beach and the Atlantic Ocean were visible. The wide-plank oak floor was bare of carpet, but waxed to a high gloss. An enormous fieldstone fireplace and chimney covered the east wall of the room. Its carved walnut mantel was scattered with mementos of the Cape's glorious days as a whaling center; carved whale's teeth, small, hand-carved long boats, a carefully polished brass ship's lantern. The furniture was white wicker, a couch and two large armchairs, and their cushions were covered in blue and green flowered sailcloth. The walls and woodwork were painted white. It was an altogether bright and cheerful room and she was more than glad to be there.

Angry cries from the front hall brought her out of her revery and she hurried to release her Siamese

cats from their wicker carrier. She opened the lid and was disapprovingly regarded by two pairs of wide blue eyes. Scolding her loudly for her forgetfulness, Solomon and Sheba leaped lightly out of the basket which had confined them for more than five hours, and began a sniffing inspection of their new home.

Elizabeth watched them for a moment and then carried her suitcase into the bedroom to begin unpacking. She heaved the valise up onto the high, fourposter bed, so high, she noticed, that a small ladder leaned against one side. The room also contained a beautifully carved rosewood washstand, a white ironstone bowl and pitcher on its marble top, and a matching bureau. She realised that the bed, washstand and bureau were of a set, and wondered from whose Beacon Hill townhouse they had come and how long ago.

She opened the drawers of the bureau and saw that they had been neatly lined with the same tiny violet sprayed wallpaper that covered the walls of the room. She laid away her underthings, smiling at their daintiness and newness. It had been a long time since she had had any new clothes, and she had splurged on an entirely new wardrobe, from lingerie to evening clothes. Merely the silky feel of the expensive crepe slips made her sigh with happiness.

She removed the skirts and blouses, the white tennis dress, the voile frocks and the two long dresses and hung them carefully away in the wardrobe. She admired the richness of the long white crepe evening dress, a richness which came of its simplicity and elegance of cut. She planned to wear it that night to the dinner dance at the Cape Country Club. Before she had left for the Cape, Maggie Langtree had called to offer her condolences, and to ask her to the dance if she should arrive in time. She supposed her period of mourning should be a bit longer, but she had been tied down so long she could not resist an invitation to dress elegantly and mingle with her friends again.

Sylvia's death had been slow in coming, and Elizabeth had cared for her lovingly throughout the long years of her illness. By the time the end came they were both exhausted, and Elizabeth felt that Sylvia had welcomed her release from pain almost with gladness. She did not think that Sylvia would begrudge her this evening of glitter after so many drab years of nursemaiding.

She heard Solomon's deep miaow from the kitchen and realised that the cats were hungry. She walked through the living room to the small but tidy kitchen and opened the ice box door. There, just as Maggie had promised, was a dish of fresh chicken livers. She smiled at her friend's

thoughtfulness and set out a dish of livers and a bowl of milk for Solomon and Sheba, who set about eating as if they had not had a scrap in a week.

She sat down at the round oak table, its huge carved lion's feet splaying out solidly beneath it, and admired the room. The floor was flagstone and slanted slightly toward the back door. She supposed this was so that the floor could be washed down and the water would run out of its own accord. The area behind the sink and stove was tiled with deep red ceramic. Bright yellow curtains billowed at the window. An altogether admirable house, she decided.

Elizabeth glanced at her watch and realised that if she was going to get to the country club by 6:30 she had better start running her bath. She went into the bathroom which opened off her bedroom and was again pleasantly struck by the general cleanliness. She turned the tap in the tub and as hot water flowed in she added some scented bath salts.

Returning to the bedroom she carefully laid out her underthings, a long white silk slip which had cost her more than it should have but which she had been unable to resist, stockings and the elegant silver evening slippers which matched her evening bag.

She undressed, hanging her clothes away in the wardrobe, and slipped into her new bathrobe, an ankle length beauty of deep pink brushed nylon. The tub was nearly brimming over with bubbles and she rushed to turn off the tap. Hanging her robe on a hook on the back of the door, she sank gratefully into the hot water and leaned back, letting the aches of a day's driving soak out.

As she lay there, thoughts of Sylvia flooded her mind. Sylvia had been the more beautiful of the two sisters, tall, willowy, her long black hair flowing past her waist. Her eyes had been like ripe olives in their blackness, and they alone had retained their vitality until the end.

Their parents had been killed in an automobile accident when Elizabeth was six years old. Sylvia, who was then 23, had with the help of their parents' considerable estate, seen that Elizabeth was properly brought up. So, when she was 22, Elizabeth had taken Sylvia to the doctor to learn that her older sister had cancer, it had seemed only natural that she be her sister's nurse. She had just graduated from college and had hoped to move down to New York from Boston, but once her sister's disease had been diagnosed there had been no question in her mind where her duty lay.

It had been a long and exhausting disease, made all the more bleak by the knowledge that it was

incurable. Sylvia had been a wonderful patient, however, even at the end when the pain was all but unbearable. Elizabeth certainly did not begrudge her the four years she had spent trying to make her comfortable and as happy as possible, and she was preparing to enter upon her real life that summer at the age of 26. She felt, and she knew that Sylvia would agree, that this evening's dance was the perfect way for her to begin.

She rose from the tub and wrapped herself in an outsized bath towel. She went into the bedroom, lit a cigarette and took a deep drag, and began to dry herself. She slipped into her underthings, delighting in their cool contact with her skin, and pulled the long silk slip on over her head. Turning, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror on the wardrobe door and caught her breath. The lovely slip was hemmed in fine Belgian lace and it occured to her that it was almost fine enough to wear to the dance itself.

She removed the white crepe dress from its hanger and slipped it on over her head. Elizabeth was tall like her sister, and indeed all the Connovers, but fuller of body than Sylvia had been. Her honey brown hair fell in loose waves to her shoulders framing an oval face with large grey eyes, straight brows that needed no plucking, a narrow straight nose and generous mouth. Not a

common face at all, she thought as she looked at herself in the mirror, but quite pleasing. The dress fit as if it had been made for her. It was sleeveless with a high neckline and empire waist. The skirt fell into a gentle A shape from two pleats beneath the bosom, a very modest dress. She grinned at herself in the mirror and turned her back, revealing that the dress left her back virtually naked. She admired the way the stark white of the dress set off her lightly tanned skin. She looked altogether lovely, she decided.

She picked up her short white kid gloves and put a comb, a handkerchief, a lipstick and a pack of cigarettes into the small kidskin silver purse, slipped her feet into the silver pumps, and turned to leave the bedroom. Sensing that she was about to leave, Solomon and Sheba had taken up positions side by side in the doorway and were regarding her sadly, their blue eyes wide and unblinking.

"I know it's mean to go off and leave you so soon," she crooned, scratching them behind their ears and beneath their chins, "but I won't be late."

She picked them both up and deposited them in the middle of the high fourposter. They settled down to sleep immediately, curled around each other, realising that no amount of gazing longingly at her was going to keep her home.

She picked up the keys to her new white MG

and went out, locking the front door behind her.

"Elizabeth Connover! It's been simply ages." She recognized Maggie Langtree's voice and saw her sweeping across the large lobby of the club house.

"Maggs. It's so good to see you," Elizabeth answered, and they embraced warmly like the childhood friends they were.

"Chase and I were so afraid you wouldn't get here in time to make the dance, dear. And we've got the *most* gorgeous man for you to meet. He's a little old for you, but he's gorgeous," Maggie rattled on at her.

"Well here I am, Maggie. I'm not sure I'm ready to meet any man, much less the most gorgeous. But, lead on MacDuff," she answered, excitement rising in her stomach at the prospect ahead.

"Well, come on then. He's sitting at our table, which you must admit is convenient. No. Don't ask. I won't tell you a thing about him," she added quickly, seeing the questions begin to form on Elizabeth's face.

As they moved across the dining room, Elizabeth was pleased to notice that several men turned to look at her as she went by. She hadn't had even a date in four years, and it pleased her that she could cause heads to turn.

"You look gorgeous, Lizzie," Maggie whispered as they approached the table.

Chase Langtree leaped up when they arrived, and folded Elizabeth in his arms, kissing her soundly on the cheek.

"It's good to see you Lizzie. It's been so long. My, you look wonderful," he said admiringly.

He turned to a tall blond man wearing a tuxedo with a waistcoat instead of a cummerbund and said, "Hamilton, may I present Elizabeth Connover. Liz, this is Hamilton Coggswell."

"How do you do, Mr. Coggswell," Elizabeth said, extending her hand.

He took it in a firm grip and said, smiling, "Please call me Hamilton, Miss Connover."

They all laughed at this, and as she sat down, Elizabeth said, "Only if you will call me Elizabeth, Mr. Coggswell."

"Would you like a drink, Elizabeth?" Hamilton asked.

"Yes, I think I would. A Scotch and water would be fine," she answered smiling.

He made the order, adding a Scotch on the rocks for himself, and turned back to the group. As Elizabeth listened to Maggie's excited chatter, she was aware of Hamilton's eyes on her, admiringly.

"Maggs, it is such a lovely little house. You

were an angel to search it out for me. It's just perfect, and thanks so much for remembering the chicken livers," Elizabeth said.

"Chicken livers?" Hamilton looked at her, his thick, straight eyebrows raised quizzically.

Elizabeth laughed and said, "I have two Siamese cats and they learned early on in their young lives that with a minor effort on their part they'd never have to eat anything but chicken livers. As cat food, it's a bit expensive, but what can I do?"

"You know, that's odd. At home I have a pair of Russian Blues and they'll eat nothing but chicken liver. So, you see, I understand perfectly," he smiled at her.

Elizabeth found herself liking this man. He was tall and lean, and quite tanned. He looked about 40, judging from the tiny smile lines around his large blue eyes. His nose was long but straight and his smile was wide, revealing strong white teeth. His jaw, although not prominent, was strong and angular.

Chase and Maggie, apparently having seen friends across the room, leapt up from the table and left Elizabeth alone with Hamilton, giving her a chance to get to know him, she supposed.

"Where is your home, Hamilton?" she asked, feeling slightly awkward.

"I live in Tangier most of the year, but I have a house here in Hyannis Port and one in Manhattan. I seem to be able to handle my business from Tangier, so I'm rarely here," he finished.

"I asked because I thought I detected a British accent and assumed you lived in London," she said, feeling more and more like an awkward Cinderella who had been dressed up, but whose fairy godmother had forgotten to tell her her lines.

He smiled, sensing her embarassment, and said, "No. My parents were British, but they lived in America and I was born here. I did go up to Oxford, however, so that may account for the British accent."

"Do you mind if I ask you another question?" she asked.

"Of course not. Fire away," Hamilton smiled encouragingly.

"Somehow, you don't seem to me to be the kind of a man who keeps cats. You are so, oh, I don't know . . . so . . ."

Hamilton broke in, helping her out of her embarrassment. "They were my wife's, you see. When she died a little over a year ago, I realised I'd grown quite fond of the little beggars, so I saw no reason to get rid of them."

"Oh, I am so sorry. I didn't mean to pry," said Elizabeth, flushing hotly.

"It's perfectly all right, Elizabeth. I am over my grief and quite unruffled by talk of my wife. In fact, it's been more of a burden on my boys than on me, because I've had my work," he said.

"How old are your children?" she asked, glad to be on safer ground.

"Matt is eight and Jonathan is not quite twelve. They both miss their mother greatly. I've tried to hire some of the young English girls who come occasionally to Tangier to act as their governess, but most of them prefer wasting their young lives sitting around the young men from America rather than take on a serious job."

"Couldn't you send them to a private school, either here or in England?" she asked.

"I've thought of that, and indeed it begins to seem like the only road left open to me. But they're so lost without their mother that I hate to send them away from me quite yet. I'd like to be able to wait until they're at least high school age," he said, a frown of concern passing over his face.

"Yes, that does make sense. How stupid of me not to have seen it," Elizabeth said, hoping she could manage to keep her foot out of her mouth for the rest of the evening.

"In fact, I made this trip to America to see about finding an American governess. I must say I've had

very little luck so far. Well, young lady, enough of my troubles. That sounds like a waltz, and you certainly look like a young lady all dressed up for a waltz." He rose, and taking Elizabeth by the hand, he led her to the dance floor. When they had reached the center of the almost empty floor, he turned and took her gently in his arms and led her into the familiar patterns of the waltz. She rested her forehead lightly against his chin and allowed herself to be led. She realised that he danced better and more effortlessly than any man she had ever danced with and abandoned herself to the delights of the waltz.

When the music stopped, she pulled herself away from his loose embrace and flushed when she realised that they had been the only couple on the floor. Everyone else had apparently sat down to watch them. Hamilton took her elbow and steered her gently across the floor to their table where she saw Chase and Maggie smiling delightedly at her.

"You two looked like Cinderella and Prince Charming from where I was sitting," Maggie laughed.

"I feel a little like Cinderella," Elizabeth laughed back, flushing with pleasure.

As they sat down, Elizabeth saw that Chase had ordered dinner for all of them.

"Oh, wonderful! I haven't had fresh lobster in I don't know how long," she exclaimed happily.

Hamilton agreed that it looked splendid and they all set about eating. Maggie's pert voice commenting on the activity around them was the only interruption until the lobsters had been reduced to small piles of red shell.

As they made use of their finger bowls, a gardenia floating in each one, and removed their lobster bibs, Hamilton said, a note of seriousness in his voice, "I have a question for Elizabeth that is perhaps too serious to ask now, but I may not have another chance."

"Do you want us to leave you two alone?" Maggie asked, a hint of mischievousness in her eyes.

"Certainly not. I'm not going to proposition her," Hamilton said laughing. "Or, maybe in a sense I am. At any rate, do stay."

"Just a moment, Hamilton. I think I know what you're going to ask, and I simply don't think it's possible," Elizabeth said, feeling an excitement she could neither account for nor quell.

"Now Elizabeth, give me a chance. Chase and Maggie have told me of your recent circumstances

and of your sister's death. I assume that you've taken this cottage here as a way back into a social life you never had, really. You're right. I am going to ask you to chuck all this and come to Tangier and act as my sons' governess."

"Ooh! Lizzie. How exciting," Maggie interjected.

"The details I will leave until later, and I neither expect nor want you to make a decision now. But I would like you to think about it very seriously. I know that you do not have to work, that you have plenty of money, but you do not seem to me to be the kind of young woman who could be idle for long. No, don't interrupt. This is not a selfless offer to a young woman recently bereft, but an entirely selfish one. I do not want to have to send my sons away to the cold, impersonal atmosphere of a boarding school so soon after the loss of their mother. All right, now. I have made my speech. Here is my phone number in Hyannis Port. I'd like you to call me within the next few days with your answer. Now, let's hear no more about it, and set about enjoying this evening."

Elizabeth spent the rest of the evening smiling and joking, dancing with Chase and Hamilton,

talking with Maggie, and unable to forget Hamilton's offer. Tangier. How exciting even the name sounded. Mysterious. The Casbah. The Dark Continent. She knew she would not sleep well this night.

CHAPTER TWO

Elizabeth sat dazed in her cabin aboard Hamilton Coggswell's yacht. It had been three days since he had made his incredible offer, three days during which Elizabeth had been able to think of nothing else, three days during which the mysterious east had beckoned to her even in her dreams. Finally, almost in self-defense, she had called him and accepted, her only proviso being that she be able to bring Solomon and Sheba with her.

Now, she was aboard a luxury yacht as big as a freighter on a voyage to a place she had never even dreamed of visiting. He had gone out of his way to ensure her comfort, even offering to buy her a plane ticket, should she feel uncomfortable about travelling alone with a man she did not know well. She was hardly alone, however. The big ship took a crew of thirty six. She had always dreamed of taking a sea voyage, and this had seemed the perfect opportunity.

That morning she had stood on deck and watched as first the Boston skyline and then the east coast shoreline disappeared on the horizon. She discovered that leaving one's native country for the first time brought pangs of a nostalgic, half-forgotten patriotism, a sort of premature homesickness. Hamilton had explained that they would travel southeast for two days until they hit the Gulf Stream and then they would follow it east to Morroco. The next visible point of land would be the Azores, Portuguese islands about eight days out.

Once they had gotten out beyond the sight of land, she had gone below to her cabin to unpack and settle in for the two week voyage. When she arrived she found that Solomon and Sheba were fast asleep on the outsized bed after their early breakfast of chicken livers. It appeared that they were going to be supreme sailors.

Her cabin was enormous, easily 20 feet on a side, and although there were nautical touches here and there, it was furnished as luxuriously as a top flight hotel room. The carpet which was pale blue stretched from wall to wall. Two large oriental rugs of the Sarkhan variety were placed atop the carpeting. The bed was king size, its headboard a massive carved affair of oiled walnut. It made a sharp but pleasing contrast to the

delicate blue of the carpet. Its spread was an enormous blue and green tapestry and fringed pillows of the same fabric were strewn about it. Two large comfortable Queen Anne chairs upholstered in yellow damask were facing a long overstuffed couch at the opposite end of the room. Chippendale occasional tables were at either end of the couch and beside both chairs. The entire room was lit indirectly, giving the room a warm comfortable glow.

Elizabeth shucked off her Sperry Topsiders, sneakers the soles of which were designed to prevent slipping on a wet deck, and squiggled her toes deep into the luxuriant pile of the oriental rug. She removed her gabardine culottes and the yellow Liberty print sleeveless blouse she had choosen as suitably sporting for such a departure, and put on her pink robe. She went into the bathroom and was amazed at what a marvel of compactness and luxury it was. The lavender tub was sunken into the floor which was carpeted in the same blue as the cabin, but had a low ledge around it to prevent sloshing during heavy weather, she assumed. All the fixtures in the room were lavender and the accessories pale blue. It was a striking effect in so small a room.

She noticed as she reached to turn on the hot water for her bath that the taps were intricately

sculptured gold and the spigot was a gold swan's head and neck. *Surely they couldn't be real gold,* she thought, but then began to wonder. Hamilton Coggswell's wealth seemed endless and she was reaching the point at which nothing about him surprised her. As she poured some scented oil into the water she remembered her shock at the first sight of the ship. She sat in the Boston harbor, barely smaller than any of the freighters docked near her, and her fresh white paint and teak decks made the ship an astounding sight. She was, Hamilton told her, 80 feet from bow to stern and weighed 5,000 tons. Her name was the Fer de Lance.

Elizabeth lowered herself into the hot bath and within minutes had been lulled by the hot water and the gentle rolling motion of the ship into a deep, dreamless sleep. She was wakened by the soft pat of Solomon's velvety foot on her nose. She woke up with a start, not quite sure at first where she was. But, she smiled as she saw Solomon perched on the ledge of the tub looking down at her, waving his tail back and forth to keep his balance. She had no idea how long she had been asleep. Solomon reached his paw out at her again, and she smiled at him.

"So you want to go exploring do you?"

She was answered by a deep miaow which turned

to a purr of happiness. Sheba appeared in the doorway, and perching on the bulkhead, added her approval of the planned exploration.

"Okay, good sailors, let me get dried off and dressed and we'll be off," she said, pulling herself up out of the barely warm water.

Once dressed, she fitted both cats into the collars and leashes she had bought fearing that they might try to jump overboard. She was surprised that they had shown no signs of resistance and indeed followed at her heels like a pair of well trained dogs.

Up on deck, they both asked to ride on her shoulder, so she lifted Solomon up to his accustomed perch and held Sheba in her arms. They were fascinated by the motion of the water and she stood by the rail for several minutes.

Hamilton was nowhere in sight and this surprised her. He had sounded like the Compleat Sailor before they left, and she was surprised that he was not up on the bridge. She supposed he was showering or napping. It had certainly been as exhausting a week for him as it had for her. She had spent one whole day talking to Maggie, half hoping she would talk her out of accepting the job. On the contrary, Maggs had urged her to go.

"After all, Lizzie," she had said, "I certainly wouldn't allow you to rush off to Tangier with

just any man. But Chase and his family have known Hamilton and his parents for years. They're fine people, and you'll be as safe as houses with him. And, you've never been abroad. I just don't understand how you can hesitate even for a moment."

Elizabeth had brought up the matter of the house she had rented for the season on the Cape. Maggie had offered to sublet it for her, had even had someone in mind who would love to have it.

Elizabeth had said she would have to close up the house in Boston and hire someone to check on it periodically. Maggie had pointed out that it was already closed up for the summer and that Chase would certainly check on it two or three times a week, because he was only commuting to the Cape on weekends.

"In fact, honey, if it'd make you feel better, he'd probably live in it during the week. It'd be much more convenient than commuting from Dedham every day."

So, hoping for disuasion, she had come away from her day with Maggie with all her logical objections wiped away. Still, it had taken two more days of fighting with herself before she had given in and accepted. By then she had begun to feel that there had never been any choice to make. It

had been made for her, and Hamilton was only waiting for her to acquiesce.

After the decision had been made, there had been the flurry of packing, getting a vaccination, a passport, the necessary shots for Solomon and Sheba, and of getting her car driven to Boston and loaded aboard the Fer de Lance. So, there was reason for both of them to be tired.

She put Solomon and Sheba down on the deck, and with the cats at her heels, she began a leisurely exploration of the boat. She walked up into the bow and stood looking at the eastern horizon. There was nothing in sight in any direction but water. It was a peculiar feeling; she felt strangely secure and relaxed. Turning toward the stern she walked back along the way she had come, deciding it might be fun to explore below decks.

Solomon and Sheba bounded down the narrow, steep stairway that led below and she followed them, with considerably less speed and grace than they had exhibited. On the cabin level, she opened a door and found herself looking down another stairway. Again the cats leapt down ahead of her and as she followed them she realised that she was in a cargo hold. There, right in the middle of the hold was her car gleaming white in the semi-darkness. Across the hold she spied another

door, half open, and walked toward it. It opened into another hold. She stood balanced on the bulkhead and looked around. It seemed empty at first, but as her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, she saw a man, short and stocky, working at something on the wall across the hold.

"Hello there!" she called.

He jerked around, a scowl on his swarthy face, and stared unsmilingly at her. She knew intuitively that she was not supposed to have seen him and, yanking gently on the cat's leashes which she had retrieved after they had leaped down the stairs, she backed slowly across the hold, bumping into her car. She turned and fled up the stairs, the cats at her heels, and emerged into the bright sunlight panting heavily. Blinded by her sudden return to daylight, she leaned against the rail, frightened and wondering where Hamilton was.

"Unless we hit some sort of freak storm, the weather ought to be this good all the way," Hamilton's voice said into her right ear.

She jumped, frightened by the suddenness and silence of his appearance.

"Oh! You frightened me, sneaking up on me like that," she said sharply. "Who is that short, swarthy man in the hold, Hamilton?" The question rushed from her mouth.

He frowned suddenly. "Doubtless one of the crewman," he said. "Why?"

"Oh, I was exploring down there, and I came upon him suddenly. He was obviously disturbed that I had seen him. I guess he frightened me," she said, trying to smile.

"I'll speak to him immediately. I won't have my crew frightening you'" he said sharply.

"Well, I'm over the scare now. Don't worry about it, please?" she asked. "Have you been taking a nap? I was. I fell asleep in my tub," she chattered on hoping to change the subject.

"I think you'll find that the sea air makes you sleepy for the first few days, but you'll get over it. At any rate, this trip is good preparation for the lazier life you'll find in Tangier, especially for one so used to the frantic pace of life in the States."

She noticed that he hadn't answered her question, merely commented on her remark, and that for the first time since she had met him he had referred to America as a foreigner does, as the States. She wondered about it, briefly, and then the notion slipped from her mind.

"Luncheon will be ready in a few moments, and afterwards, I think you'll find that you're sleepy again," he said, smiling down at her.

"Why, is the food drugged?" she asked jok-

ingly. A shock of alarm passed over her as a dark look, a frown, flitted across his face.

"I was only joking, of course, Hamilton. Calm down. Are you in the habit of drugging ladies?" she asked again, attempting to joke and clear the atmosphere.

"Every chance I get," he countered. "It's not unknown in the mysterious Casbah, you know, to drug a lady and carry her off to a harem."

She relaxed at his joke, but a queer feeling of uneasiness lay in the pit of her stomach. She was determined not to be sleepy after lunch.

"Shall we go, then?" she asked brightly.

"The dining room is this way, madame," he said, playing the gallant. "Only on a ship of this kind, we call it the saloon."

After they had been seated by the steward, neat and efficient in his starched whites, Elizabeth said, "You must tell me about your house in Tangier."

"Which one?" he said, looking amused.

"Oh, Hamilton. Really. I should have guessed. Well, which ever one we'll be staying in."

"Well, the beach house, a small villa east of the city, needs some repairs, so we'll be staying up in the Casbah at least until the repairs are finished."

"The Casbah! Hamilton, I thought the Casbah was full of sexual perverts and rich Arabs with

harems and white slavers and I don't know what all," Elizabeth chattered excitedly.

"Don't be silly, Elizabeth," he smiled fondly. "As a matter of fact there is quite a large population of wealthy Europeans and Americans living up there. Your own Barbara Hutton has a house there, you know."

There it was again, that disturbing reference to her country as if it were not his own. She brushed the thought from her mind. After all, Chase Langtree did not give his unequivocal approval of someone lightly.

"Of course," she said. "I had forgotten that," she added, looking sheepish.

Luncheon was served by the same impeccably dressed steward, and Elizabeth was glad, but not surprised, to remark the high quality of his service. The appetizer was scampi in a hearty garlic butter sauce and Elizabeth was sure it was better than any served in Le Pavillon. The scampi were accompanied by a dry white wine that complemented their flavor perfectly.

"Where did you get your chef, Hamilton? He's superb."

"I hired him away from the Tour d'Argent in Paris. He is good, isn't he?" Hamilton said, smiling smugly at his culinary success.

The main course was filet of sole in a lemony white wine sauce and cold asparagus vinaigrette. It was the best food Elizabeth could remember having eaten anywhere.

"You know, I haven't done a good deal of eating out, because of my sister's illness, but I fancied myself something of a French chef. Julia Child lived next door to me in Boston, and she used to give me an occasional helping hand if I got stuck on something like curdled Hollandaise. I see now that, her compliments aside, it was fairly naive of me to assume anything of the sort," she said as they lingered over espresso and brandy.

"Ah. Julia Child is a fine cook, and if she says so, I'm sure you are too. But it's hard to match the Tour d'Argent. And, dinner will be just as good," he promised, smiling at her pleasure in the food.

"Would you like to dress for dinner, my dear? I usually do on the first and last nights at sea," he added, a twinkle in his eye.

"I'd love to," she said. *What a romantic idea,* she thought, her feelings of uneasiness entirely dissipated now and replaced by a feeling of complete well-being.

"Well, young lady, I don't know about you, but I'm sleepy. It's a nap for me. I'll see you at dinner.

Or, better still, shall I call for you at your cabin at about seven?"

"That would be perfect, Hamilton," she said and smiled. "Perhaps I'll take a nap myself."

They did indeed dress for dinner on that night, and in fact, on the following nights of their voyage. It was just as calm and idyllic as Hamilton had promised. As the days passed, lazily in a haze of salt spray and sunshine, Elizabeth grew tanner and knew that she was calmer and more happy than she had been since the years before her sister's illness.

On the last night out from Tangier, she sat before her dressing table putting the finishing touches on her hair and make-up. She had had a queer but happy feeling of anticipation all day, and she wanted to look especially well that night at dinner, although she could not have told why had someone asked her.

She laid down her hairbrush, having finished the requisite hundred strokes, and began to apply her make-up. She used no foundation as her skin was clear and tanned, but she applied a light grey shadow on her eyelids and drew a thin black line across the lids close to the lashes. She then applied mascara and a touch of pale pink lipstick and was through.

As she hooked the clasp of the opera length strand of pearls that had been her mother's and were to be her only adornment, she appraised herself coolly in the mirror. She was wearing the long white crepe dress she had worn the night she and Hamilton had met, and, objectively, she had to admit that she looked quite lovely enough for whatever it was that was going to happen to her that night. She slipped her bare feet into the silver slippers and flicked out the lights. Followed by Solomon and Sheba who had taken to eating in the saloon with her and Hamilton, she left her cabin.

Hamilton was waiting for her at the door to the saloon dressed in the same dinner jacket and waistcoat he had worn the night they met. She wondered if his reasons for wearing the same clothes as he had that first night were the same as hers.

"Hello, lovely lady," he said, smiling and bowing crisply as she approached. "You certainly do look special tonight."

"Well, thank you kind sir. I think it is a special night. Tomorrow we'll be in Tangier, and although that is exciting, the last night aboard ship is exciting in its own special way."

"Dinner will be special tonight, too, Elizabeth. We're having Beef Wellington, preceded by Co-

quilles St. Jacques and followed by meringues and champagne. How does that sound?"

"Oh, Hamilton, that sounds wonderful," she said.

He held her chair until she was seated and then went around the table and took his own seat, across from her. Silver candle sticks held the only light in the room, and she thought he looked very handsome as he unfolded his napkin, a signal to the steward to begin serving. The steward bent down momentarily, and suddenly the saloon was filled with Mozart.

"Hamilton, your surprises never cease. I was thinking today that music has been the only thing lacking during our meals. This is just too perfect."

"I'm glad you're pleased, my dear. My surprises are not over yet," he added, smiling mysteriously.

"I'm sure not. You are a man of many mysteries, Hamilton, and you continue to surprise me daily," she said, laughing fondly.

The steward appeared on her left and laid a plate of steaming Coquilles on the service plate in front of her. The beautiful aroma of perfectly seasoned and sauced scallops floated up and she felt her mouth water.

"Don't wait for me, Elizabeth. Your food will be cold, if you do," he said smiling.

As she tasted the first bite of delicate seafood, the steward filled her wine glass with a light, dry Pouilly Fuisse that went perfectly with the flavor of the scallops. She and Hamilton, both apparently hungry from a day in the sea air, did not speak again until the Beef Wellington had been served along with its dry, full-bodied Burgundy. Elizabeth cut through the filet and its pastry crust with her fork and as she let the flavor linger in her mouth, the expected brief trace of pate de foie gras and truffles remained. She was about to compliment Hamilton on his chef for the hundredth time when he broke in.

"Elizabeth, dear. We have gotten to be close friends during the past two weeks. We have learned many things about each other, and have, I think, found that we are more than fond of one another. You must forgive the stiffness of my speech, but, you see, it has been fifteen years since I proposed to a woman, and I don't suppose I'm as good at it as your young men in America."

She sat there stunned, appalled by the strength of her happiness at what he had said. She realised suddenly that she had known for several days that this was coming, and had been waiting, calm and happy in the knowledge, for his speech. But, un-

derneath her joy, a slight squeamishness lurked. There was that reference to "her" America again.

Hamilton had gotten up and come around the table to her side. She felt his hand at her elbow and stood up at the slight but undeniable pressure there. She brushed all squeamish thoughts away as she heard him say, "Oh, Elizabeth, surely this is not so much of a surprise. Surely you knew. Please tell me that you will marry me."

And she heard herself answer, and knew that she could not have answered any other way had she wanted to. "Yes, Hamilton darling, I will marry you."

She felt tears of joy gather in her eyes as he toasted her with champagne, and yet, at the same time, a small niggling twitch of warning lay in her stomach. She shrugged it away, and went to him gladly as he held his arms open for her, and accepted and returned his kiss.

CHAPTER THREE

Elizabeth was out on deck at first light the next morning, so she would not miss the first sight of Africa springing up on the horizon. It appeared first as a low, dim outline on the eastern horizon, and as she watched, it became more and more visible with startling quickness. In what seemed like no time, she could make out forests and fields and roads twisting up the mountainsides.

By 8 o'clock the Fer de Lance had turned north and was following the coast of Morocco. Opposite her on the shore stood a sparkling little white town dominated by a thin, very tall tower. Elizabeth assumed, from her eighth grade introduction to the history of Moslem Africa, that this was the minaret or tower from which the call to prayer was sung.

She leaned against the rail letting the strangeness of the idea that this was not just any coastline, but that of another continent, seep in. Her thoughts were also occupied with the events of the night before. She was going to marry Hamilton

Coggswell. and she was going to marry him quite soon. Although the idea made her ecstatically happy, a small doubt born of the mysteries that remained in her mind about him, nagged at her. She supposed that the combination of facts and circumstances was just too much to be dealt with at one time, and that as she grew to know him more intimately, the doubt would disappear.

At any rate, Africa was right in front of her and Hamilton was not, so she decided to enjoy the thing at hand and deal with her feelings about him later. She drew in her breath sharply as the ship rounded a point of land and, as suddenly as if it had dropped out of the sky, a city that could only be Tangier was spread out in a great semi circle in front of her. Its beach curved around what seemed to be a long peninsula and from behind the easternmost end of the beach rose low, rolling hills dotted with small white villages, each surmounted by a minaret. The scene reminded her of nothing so much as pictures of Palestine that she remembered from her Sunday School textbooks. It was a breathtaking sight.

"It is beautiful, isn't it?" Hamilton's voice spoke quietly in her ear.

"Oh, Hamilton. I was completely unprepared for anything this lovely," she exclaimed. "How

long have you been watching me? You do sneak up very quietly," she added laughing.

He smiled and said, "I guess it's a habit I picked up from the Arabs. I don't sneak consciously, but I guess I do walk quietly. I've been here twenty minutes or so. I enjoyed watching your reaction to Africa."

She turned back to the white city lying along its hills before her and noticed that the ship had stopped. She heard a great clanking of chains and turned to look questioningly at Hamilton.

"Like any other vessel coming in from a foreign country, we must drop anchor in the harbor and wait for a pilot and a custom's official to come aboard, Elizabeth. Nothing to be alarmed about. If you watch you'll see the mate drop a rope ladder over the side. See, here comes the pilot's launch now," he finished, pointing his finger at a small boat approaching rapidly on their starboard side.

She watched as a dark little man clambered up the rope ladder and approached them. Hamilton shook hands warmly with him and had a rapid and friendly conversation in what Elizabeth took to be Arabic.

"Elizabeth, dear, come here a moment," Hamilton called. He introduced her to the man whose

name was Mohammed. She was surprised when he extended his hand to her, smiling broadly. Two gold teeth flashed in the sun as Elizabeth took his hand and shook it once. She was used to a man waiting to see if a woman would offer to shake hands. She supposed many customs and habits were to be changed.

Mohammed then disappeared onto the bridge and skillfully and quickly, without the use of the tugs that had been necessary at the start of the trip in Boston, manuevered the big yacht close up against the huge pier which jutted like a bending arm out into the sea. Soon the ship was tied fast to the jetty and Elizabeth waited on deck for Hamilton to appear. He had gone below when Mohammed had gone to the bridge.

He came swinging down the deck toward her in a peculiar long, brown robe with a hood. Laughing at her surprise he extended a similar garment toward her and said, "You don't have to wear it, of course. It's a jalaba, the traditional garment here. I find I can move about more freely if I wear one, and besides, it's far the most comfortable thing in this climate. We will have to walk up to the Casbah and I think you'll be the cause of much less excitement if you do choose to wear it."

She took a long but very lightweight white wool robe from him and slipped it on over her head. She

was surprised that it fit perfectly and rather enjoyed its foreign feel. She knew she must look strange, and turned around for Hamilton's assessment.

"A proper little Arab boy you look," he said laughing.

"Boy?"

"I didn't have a haique, the traditional women's robe. But the jalaba has more style anyway. You look wonderful," he said and kissed her lightly on the tip of her nose.

It was the first time that day he had touched her at all and she felt reassured. She had begun to think that his proposal the night before was a figment of her imagination.

She looked around for her baggage but Hamilton said, "Don't worry about the luggage. I've sent for some boys to carry it for us. They know where to take it. Come, let me introduce you to Tangier," and he took her hand and led her down the gangplank.

They walked up the pier and Elizabeth was struck by its silence. All she could hear was the surf and the shrill cries of the gulls. They turned off the pier and walked through an arch to a wide, palm lined boulevard.

"This is the Avenida di Spagna, my dear. It runs the length of the city alon gthe beach. Come,

up this way. You'll soon find that Tangier is a city of hills, and one always seems to be walking up them and not down."

They approached a Moorish arch in a cobbled wall and Hamilton told her it had been built by the Portuguese to fortify the old city against attack by Portugal's enemies, in the sixteenth century. As they walked through Elizabeth's ears were assaulted by the most tremendous street noise she had ever heard. The contrast between the silence of the pier and the Avenida, and the tumult of sound in which she found herself was as extreme as night and day.

She looked about in fascination at the men in jalabas and backless yellow slippers. Hamilton told her that the slippers were universal Arab footgear because they were easy to slip in and out of at the Mosque and at home. Arabs do not wear shoes inside either of these places.

The women all wore long, straight, grey hooded robes and veils.

"I thought the veil had been legislated against," she whispered to Hamilton.

"You needn't whisper, my dear. They don't understand English. It was, but Morocco is a very conservative and traditional Moslem country and things do not change here quickly."

At this point the steep hill they were climbing

flattened out into a small square, really no more than a widening in the street. It was lined with small, balconied hotels each with a cafe in its ground floor. The chairs and tables of the cafes spilled out onto the sidewalks. The square was full of people, some bent on errands, some just milling about, many standing in groups deep in conversation. Elizabeth stood watching the scene and panting heavily.

"Would you like to sit down for a moment? This is no easy walk for a neophyte and we're not nearly there yet," Hamilton said.

"Very much," she panted.

He guided her to a table in a cafe the awning of which proclaimed it to be the Cafe Central. He held a chair for her and she sank into it gratefully. He ordered from the waiter in Arabic and turned to her.

"I've ordered you a mint tea, a hot, but I think you'll find, refreshing drink. This is called the Zoco Chico or small square. Up that hill is the Zoco Grande where many of the food stalls are located. This is the center of the Medina, or old city, dear. Do you see why we had to walk here?" he asked.

"Well, I haven't seen an automobile since we passed through the Portuguese wall," she said.

"Right you are. The streets are so narrow in the

Medina that almost no cars except ambulances and police vehicles are allowed here. We could have taken a taxi to the wall, but it wouldn't have shortened our walk appreciably and it would have ruined the effect of the abrupt change from silence to deafening noise for you."

The waiter brought their tea and set it down, the tall glasses on little white china saucers. She touched the glass and quickly withdrew her hand.

"It's too hot, Hamilton," she said.

"It is hot, Elizabeth, but you should sip it that way. It looses flavor as it cools."

She took a tentative sip and was delighted by the hot, sweet, minty flavor. She set her glass down and leaned back to rest and look at the Zoco Chico. Small Arab boys rushed to and fro talking to tourists in amazingly good English, offering, she supposed, to show them the secrets of the Medina and Casbah for nominal fees.

She reached for her tea again and was chagrined to see a bee hovering over her glass. As she watched, it lit on the edge and crawled inside toward the clump of mint. Suddenly it lost its footing and fell into the hot tea where it struggled for a moment and then drowned. Elizabeth shivered involuntarily and saw Hamilton watching her, a smile on his face.

"If I believed in omens and portents, that would

frighten me," she laughed. But Sylvia had been the mystic in the family, reading omens into every event and laying out the Taro deck often to tell her own fortune. It was a bit uncanny the way the hanging man, the symbol of death, had come up in Sylvia's fortune almost without fail. Elizabeth shivered again and then realised that Hamilton was talking to her.

"Hustling tourists is big business for these children. It's about all many of them do," he was saying.

"Poor things," she murmured.

"You mustn't let that attitude get a grip on you, my dear, or you'll be down here every day giving your money away to the little beggars. They don't starve, Moslems will not allow it, and they learn very young how to take care of themselves," he said.

"I think I'm rested enough to go on now," she said.

Hamilton paid the bill and they stood up to leave. Elizabeth heard Hamilton's name called out across the square and she turned to see an enormous Arab approaching. He was portly without being fat and he walked with an assurance and grandeur that Elizabeth had not noticed in other Arabs. He had a heavy brown wool jalaba on, the usual yellow slippers and a red fez. His nose,

which was more than generous, was intricately hooked as if it had been broken many times. His eyes were as hard as black marbles.

The big Arab took her in at a glance, nodded vaguely, and turned to talk to Hamilton in rapid Arabic. She felt a slight tug at the sleeve of her jalaba and looked down. A small but very handsome Arab boy dressed in blue jeans and a striped tee shirt stood looking brightly up at her. He was about eleven and his brown eyes twinkled at her as he said, "How are you . . . fine? I am Mohammed. You are American lady? I learn English at the American School. My father is chief of the post office. I show you the casbah, one dirham only."

"Hello, Mohammed. Yes, I'm fine. No, thank you, I don't need a guide," she answered.

He looked glum for a moment, then smiled brightly and said, "Okay, maybe tomorrow," and shook her hand and walked away. She noticed that he immediately spied a tourist couple and attached himself to the lady like a leech, repeating the same speech and holding her hand.

She turned back to find that the huge Arab had left and Hamilton was watching her fondly.

"He didn't try very hard," she laughed and pointed at the small boy who was still clinging to the woman's hand and tugging her off toward the inner Medina.

"He knew that you were with me and that he didn't have a chance. Well, let's be on our way."

He took her arm and led her off to the right, into the narrowest street she had ever been on. The street was paved with large cobblestones and was no more than five feet wide. Small shops in the first floors of the houses opened right onto the street. Jalabas hung from the door jambs and she could see bolts of material stacked in the dark interiors. In some of the shops men pounded pieces of leather with large, flat-bottomed pestles, and rows of yellow backless slippers told her that these were shoe shops. The street twisted and turned and was alive with women shopping. Children dodged in and out between the legs of the hurrying adults, and all the activity produced a quality of street noise that taught Elizabeth the true meaning of the word cacophony.

Hamilton directed her sharply right and they turned into another street, even narrower than the first. They seemed to be out of the merchants district now, and, except for the peasant women squatting along the sides of the street, rows of fruit set out on towels in front of them, in a residential area. Big carved wooden doors, some with ornate brass screws and knockers, fronted the houses now. The street began to rise sharply and as Elizabeth looked ahead, the street curved so

sharply that she could see no end to the hill. Small streets, so narrow that only one person could walk through at a time, ran off the street they travelled at right angles.

"Are you sure you know where we're going?" she asked, feeling a peculiar certainty that she was lost in this maze of narrow streets and tiny houses forever.

"Quite sure, my dear. And you'll soon know your way about too. We turn again here, to the left," he directed her, a slight pressure at her elbow.

They turned into a street so narrow that it allowed only two people to walk abreast. The houses were neatly whitewashed and the windows had small wooden balconies beneath them. Elizabeth was charmed to notice that the undersides of these balconies were painted in intricate designs, almost as if to make the traveller's journey more pleasant. Ahead, a large house appeared, its clay walls washed white, a enormous bush hanging over its garden wall. Great blue-purple flowers bloomed in the bush and Elizabeth sighed her admiration.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say those were morning glories," she said.

"Exactly right, my dear. But they are enormous blooms, aren't they?" he answered.

"Yes, and I've never seen purple morning glories either. They're beautiful," she breathed.

They continued for another ten minutes, twisting and turning through the narrow streets when suddenly an enormous Moorish arch appeared ahead. It was cut in a stuccoed cobblestone wall which was crenellated along its upper edge.

"This is the entrance to the Casbah, Elizabeth," Hamilton said. "These walls have stood since the Phoenecians were here. They have protected this citadel for more than three thousand years. That is all a Casbah is, you know, a citadel, a high but impregnable city within a city."

They walked through the gate and she found herself in a large cobbled square, a lovely white building, windows fashioned like small Moorish arches, on the left, and the house of some very rich man on the right. Straight ahead a low wall seemed to offer a view of something and it was toward this that Hamilton led her. She looked over the wall and saw a sheer cliff which dropped 500 feet to the Atlantic Ocean. The cliff was thickly grown with flowering bushes and it was a lovely sight. Down on the beach, Arab women, their haiques tied up around their waists, waded in the surf.

"You can see now why this was an all but im-

pregnable fortress during a time of war," Hamilton said. He turned and leaned against the wall. As Elizabeth turned to join him, she drew her breath in sharply. There, ranged at her feet, was the entire Medina and off to the right the European section of the city, the Mediterranean and the beach.

"This may be a city of hills, Hamilton, but it's also a city of prospects. I've never seen a view like this."

"Yes, that's true. Every time you turn a corner, some lovely view springs into sight. That, on the other hand, is the city jail," he said pointing to the large white building. She noticed now that the Moorish windows had bars on them. "And that is the house of my friend Mustafa ben Youssef, the big man who spoke to me in the Zoco Chico," he added, pointing to the lovely house on the left.

"Where is your house, Hamilton?" she asked, feeling a little overcome with her impressions and experiences that day.

"Down that street about a hundred yards," he said. "Come, you look exhausted. I'm afraid I dragged you about too long. It is a steep climb if you're not used to it," he said and took her hand and led her to the left down a narrow street near the gate they had entered.

She saw ahead of her on the left a huge white

house, flat roofed like the others, but much larger than any she had seen yet. Its windows, small Moorish arches, were shaded by green tile awnings built into the walls. It had, from Elizabeth's angle at least, four floors and each storey had a terrace with a crenellated wall atop the floor below. A long garden wall indicated no paucity of grounds around the house, but Elizabeth was in no way prepared for the lushness and beauty of the garden they entered through a tall blue gate.

A profusion of sights and smells assaulted her and she recognized them as she sorted them out as bougainvillea, its red-purple flowers thick on the vine, a mimosa tree in bloom, the ground beneath it covered with its round yellow flowers, wisteria climbing up the wall, its heavy blue flowers exuding a beautiful smell and honeysuckle. There was a huge magnolia tree in one corner of the garden, and a moon vine, its creamy yellow trumpets alive with bees. The bees reminded her that the moonvine was also called the belladonna tree. In another corner a large palm tree rose majestically.

A carpet of green grass tempted her to remove her shoes, and as she did, she giggled. "So that's how he knew I wasn't an Arab," she laughed.

"Whatever are you talking about, Elizabeth?" Hamilton asked.

"Mohammed, the little boy in the Zoco Chico. He saw my sneakers sticking out from under my jalaba," she said and laughed again.

She sank her feet into the cool grass and sighed with pleasure.

"This is too beautiful, Hamilton. My mind is a confusion of beauties and noises and strange encounters, and I'm exhausted. It will take me days of asking you questions to sort it all out," she smiled up at him.

"Well, come in and see the house. You look ready to drop and I hope it will not prove to be the straw that broke the camel's back for you. It is quite a lovely house, and I'm very proud of it."

As he led her toward the dark interior of the house, she realized that this was the house his wife had died in. She wondered how she had died. As they approached the open French doors, she noticed a slender, darkly handsome young man of about her own age lounging against them. Hamilton waved to him, unsmiling, and Elizabeth had the sudden irrational feeling that she was being led into a lovely but inescapable prison.

CHAPTER FOUR

Elizabeth could hear Hamilton somewhere far away in the house shouting, "Jonathan, Matt, Hassan, come see the surprise I've brought you."

She smiled to herself as she sat waiting for them in the living room of this beautiful house. Never had she seen a house as beautiful as Hamilton's. Her own house in Boston had a certain quiet stateliness born of well-oiled antiques and rich, slightly faded Oriental rugs, the kind of house which has seen more splendid times but which wears its age with dignity.

But Hamilton's house was entirely different. It was sumptuous. It was not what she had imagined as Moroccan in style, indeed most of the furniture was antique, but the wall hangings and the Persian rugs and the leather hassocks lent it a decidely eastern flavor.

She was sitting in a large wing chair beautifully upholstered in deep blue silk brocade and she let her eyes sweep slowly around the room. The floor

beneath the carpets was blue and white patterned ceramic tile and the walls were painted a stark white. Her chair was near the northern windows which looked down over the Casbah and the Mediterranean. Between and across from her chair and another just like it was a lovely Edwardian love seat covered with pale, olive green velvet. Two Chippendale end tables stood by either arm. Along the wall to the right, on which was hung an ancient Belgian tapestry, was an enormous couch, thick with down-filled pillows and covered with a luxurious blue cut velvet material. At the opposite end of the room was a grand piano and a small chaise longue unholstered in green and white satin. Next to it a small carved rosewood woman's writing desk and chair. A leather armchair and hassock stood near the desk. It was a lovely room, formal, yet lived in.

Evidence of Hamilton's fine taste in art hung on the walls; a Gauguin of the Tahitian period, a sunny Renoir, a portrait of a hooded man that she recognised as an Albrecht Durer, a huge Picasso woman and a small Andrew Wyeth. The Wyeth was one of her favorites, a long shallow canvas depicting two dead crows lying, feet up, in a farmer's field. As she stood up to look more closely at it, she heard Hamilton, nearer now, still calling

his sons and this Hassan, whom Elizabeth assumed to be a servant.

A sudden movement in a chair near the piano which faced toward the south windows rather than into the room, startled her and she gave a small cry as an arm appeared over the back of the chair waving lazily, and a deep voice yelled, "I'm in here, Hamilton. I've been spying on your lady."

"Who are you, young man?" Elizabeth demanded, her fright giving a more imperious tone to her voice than she had intended.

"I am Richard, called Hassan by friend and foe alike, brother to the illustrious Hamilton," the voice replied.

Slowly the young man stood up and turned to face her and she was shocked by his appearance. He was as like Hamilton as a bull is like a gazelle. He was dark skinned, his hair was jet black and curly, he was quite short and wiry, although well proportioned. Quantities of black hair curled on his arms and the backs of his hands. His mouth was twisted cruelly in what she supposed was intended as a smile.

"And who are you?" he said, mimicking her tone of voice.

She extended her hand toward him and said, "I am Elizabeth Connover. Your brother has hired me to act as governess to your nephews."

"More than a governess, I think," he said with the same smile and shook her hand brusquely.

She was saved from having to make a retort by Hamilton's appearance in the French doors.

"Hassan, how are you," he said warmly, although Elizabeth noted that only his lips smiled. He shook Hassan's hand and turned to make introductions.

"We've introduced ourselves, your lady and I," Hassan said.

"Matt and Jonathan are down at the beach. I expect they will have seen the ship and will be here almost immediately," he added, and stalked out into the garden and disappeared around the side of the house.

"You never told me you had a brother, Hamilton," Elizabeth said.

"He's my half-brother actually. When my mother died, my father married an Arab woman. He is their child," Hamilton explained perfunctorily.

"You don't seem to get on particularly well," Elizabeth said, prompting him to tell her more about this strange, dark young man.

"Well, it's a long story, but the gist of it is that Hassan had distinguished himself early on as a spendthrift and gambler. So, when my father died, he left the whole estate to me with the provision

that I provide adequately for Hassan's welfare. Since Hassan's vice is gambling, and he rarely wins, his idea of adequate monetary provision and mine are widely divergent, I'm afraid. Does that explain it?"

"Yes, certainly," she said. "But, you know, it's odd. He seems to resent my presence, somehow," she mused.

Hamilton folded her against him and kissed the tip of her nose and said, "Elizabeth, don't let him worry you. Ignore him if he continues to be unpleasant. But, I'll see to it that he doesn't. I won't have you worry about such petty matters as that."

Elizabeth broke away from Hamilton's embrace as she heard a commotion in the hall. The door burst open and two young boys, both the image of their father, rushed into the room, shouting, "Hey, Dad, where are you? We watched the ship dock, where are. . . ."

As they caughted sight of Elizabeth they fell silent and stopped dead in their tracks. The younger of the two boys, Elizabeth assumed it was Matthew, overcame his surprise first and rushed into his father's arms, yelling his happiness to see him.

The elder boy, seeming somewhat shy, approached slowly, his eyes on Elizabeth warily, but finally could contain himself no longer, and rushed

forward to get his share of the welcoming hugs.

Hamilton finally extricated himself from the jumble of arms and legs and stood up.

"Boys, this is Miss Elizabeth Connover. Elizabeth, these are Jonathan and Matthew, my sons," he said. He had an arm around each boy and he indicated with a nod which was Matt and which Jon, and it had been as Elizabeth suspected.

"Hi there, Miss Connover. You're sure pretty. Are you going to be our governess, are you?" Matt extended his hand to Elizabeth and pumped it energetically smiling up at her as he asked these questions.

"Why thank you, Matt. If I can call you Matt, you may call me Elizabeth, or if you prefer, Liz. Yes, I'm to be your teacher, and I'm sure we'll get along fine."

She let go of the younger boy's hand, smiling at him, and turned her attention to Jonathan who extended his hand without meeting her gaze and said, "How do you do, Miss Connover."

He let go of her hand immediately and retreated to a corner. She knew she was going to have to work hard to gain this child's trust and confidence.

Jonathan was tall and fair with blue eyes and Hamilton's strong jawline. He was going to grow more and more like his father as he grew older. His skin had been burned deep brown by the sun,

and he was, on first glance, a handsome and healthy child. But a longer look revealed a deep sadness about him, an insularity that was not natural for a boy of fourteen. Matt, she saw, was stockier and more outgoing, a cheerful, healthy lad, and Elizabeth found herself drawn to him immediately.

"Boys, have you seen any sign of Ahmed and the luggage?" Hamilton asked.

"Yes, Dad. We passed them running up from the beach. They ought to be here any minute, but they've been stopping at every fountain all the way up to get a drink, and they're making a great fuss to the neighbors about how heavy their load is," Jonathan said.

"Hey Dad," Matt piped in. "Did you bring some more cats home? There's a basket that keeps miaowing in a funny deep voice. Ahmed is carrying it and letting the other servants do all the rest of the work."

"Those are my two Siamese cats, Matt. I've been hoping all the way over that they'll get along with your Nicholas and Natasha," Elizabeth answered.

"Siamese cats! What's a Siamese cat? I've never seen one. Can I play with them? What are their names?" Matt's questions poured out too fast for Elizabeth to answer, and before she had a chance, Jonathan cut in.

"You dummy. Everybody knows what a Siamese cat is. They have blue eyes and Miss Connover's crazy if she lets you play with anything," Jonathan said and went out into the garden.

He was saved from a reprimand from his father by the arrival in the hall of six Arab porters, the luggage and, lastly, Ahmed and the wicker carrier. Ahmed, who resembled nothing so much as a djinni, was as tall as Hamilton, with a round, hard belly, baggy bloomers she had seen other Arab men wearing, and yellow baboosh. He walked carefully into the house, bearing the wicker carrier in his arms as if it contained all the world's most delicate and fragile bird's eggs. At each sound from Solomon, Ahmed's turbaned head jerked back in amazement.

Elizabeth thanked Ahmed for his great concern for the cats and relieved him of the carrier. She set it down on the floor and said, "Come here, Matt. Meet Solomon and Sheba."

He came and squatted down next to her, his eyes glued to the cover of the carrier. She opened the lid, and there, side by side, sat two very angry Siamese cats, blinking their eyes in the sudden light and miaowing at everyone in the room. Ahmed backed out of the room under their baleful glares, and Elizabeth laughed at him as she scratched the cats behind the ears.

She laughed out loud when Solomon, with great dignity, turned his back on her and continued his lament in the other direction.

"He's making sure I know he's not going to forgive me easily. He hates to ride in that carrier," she explained to Matt who watched fascinated as the cats performed.

Still not admitting that he had forgiven her, Solomon jumped out of the carrier and began to sniff at the carpets and the furniture around him.

"He's getting acquainted with the room," she told Matt and was surprised to hear Jonathan's voice say, "We know that. We have cats too, you know. We're not dummies."

"Jonathan! Apologize to Elizabeth this minute and then go to your room," Hamilton's voice rang out sternly.

"Oh, Hamilton, that isn't necessary, really," she objected.

"It certainly is. This young man has got to learn some manners. Now, Jonathan," Hamilton retorted.

Jonathan mumbled an apology and ran from the room and Elizabeth heard his footsteps retreating up the stairs.

Solomon and Sheba were making a sniffing tour in earnest and Matthew, smiling back at her, followed them from the room.

'Elizabeth, before we start poking around that luggage, let's have a drink. You've had a long, hard day, and I certainly could use a martini. The servants will take the luggage upstairs to your rooms, and will unpack for you, if you like, so you don't have to worry about it at all," Hamilton said.

"That sounds lovely, Hamilton, but will I have time before dinner for a bath too?" she asked.

"Certainly, plenty of time. Do you want a gin or vodka martini? If you like vodka, I've got some of the best Russian stuff. I prefer gin myself," he said.

"Gin for me, too, thanks. But I'd like mine on the rocks, please," she smiled up at him.

Hamilton handed her a drink and she sank down gratefully on the striped chaise longue while he pulled the leather chair closer to her.

"Don't mind Jonathan, Elizabeth. He's being very difficult, I know," Hamilton said.

"Well, he's at a difficult age, Hamilton. and losing his mother was probably more of a blow to him than to Matt. It's clear that he's afraid I'm going to try to take her place, and we'll be best of friends when he sees that I'm not trying to do that," she said seriously.

"But, in a sense you are, you know. When we're married, you'll be his mother, and he might as well realize that," Hamilton said.

"Well, I'll be his stepmother. We must become friends before I can be anything more important to him than that. We'll be friends, you'll see, when he realises that your love for me, which he surely senses, does not alter the depth of your feeling for his mother," Elizabeth said.

"A long sentence for a little girl like you," Hamilton smiled.

"No, I'm serious, Hamilton. Don't be too hard on him. He needs discipline, certainly. All children need that, but he needs even more to be reassured of your love for him. Gentleness will win this battle long before harsh discipline will," she finished.

"You're a very wise young lady, Elizabeth. That's one of the reasons I love you so much," he said quietly.

Suddenly Hamilton burst into peals of laughter.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It just occurred to me that you certainly do look silly sitting there with your feet tucked under you spouting child psychology in a jalaba. You can take it off now. In all the excitement, I hadn't even noticed you still had it on," he laughed.

She looked down and saw her bare toes sticking out from under the folds of the jalaba and began to laugh herself. She stood up and pulled it off over her head and hung it over the back of a chair. Almost before she had sat down again, an Arab

woman appeared silently behind her, removed the garment and began to leave the room.

"Fatima," Hamilton said, calling her back.

The Arab woman turned and approached him shyly, her eyes downcast.

"Fatima, this is Miss Connover. Liz, this is Fatima; she will be your maid," he said.

Elizabeth shook the woman's hand, returning her shy look. Any smile was hidden from Elizabeth bv her veil. She remarked the dark beauty of the older woman's kohl smudged eyes. As she sat down, Fatima turned and left the room silently.

"She walks so quietly, Hamilton," Elizabeth remarked.

"She's quiet because her feet are bare. No Arab wears his shoes in his own or anyone else's house," he explained.

"Does she speak any English?" Elizabeth asked.

"Her English is poor, but she speaks fluent French. However, she understands most domestic directions given in English. But, if you have any French, it would probably be easiest to use it with her," he said.

Elizabeth took a sip of her martini.

"What time will dinner be, Hamilton? I do want a bath before then," she said.

"Dinner will be in about an hour, so I suppose

if you want your bath, you'd best take it now," he answered.

"Fine," she said, getting up from her chair. "Oh, but I don't have the slightest idea where my room is."

"You've only seen this room and the garden, haven't you?" Hamilton asked.

"Yes. But the walk through the Casbah was so full of strange and exciting things, that I think I'd like to take the house in stages. Perhaps my senses will be sufficiently recovered after dinner for a full tour," she said.

"Fine then. Go up through the hall. Your room is down the hall to the right at the top of the stairs. It's the one at the end of the hall. Do you want me to take you up?" he asked.

"No, dear. You finish your drink and relax. This hasn't been an easy day for you either. I'll find it," she said.

She kissed him on the forehead and went out into the hall. Its floor was tiled like the living room, and the stairs rose, tiled and railless, on the far wall. As she mounted the stairs, she saw Hassan saunter past the window at the back of the hall, scowling darkly. She hoped, somehow, that he had not seen her. She ran up the stairs and turned right at the top, not stopping to look at

anything. She would save the rest of the house for after dinner.

She opened the door at the end of the hall and drew in her breath sharply at the room that confronted her. It was large and white and seemed at first like something out of the Arabian Nights. Oriental rugs were scattered here and there over the green and white tile floor. The tile was decorated in a sort of olive green paisley pattern, a color which appeared in each of the rugs. The bed was enormous and lower than is usual and was covered with a heavy, tasselled green and gold spread. Gold and green and rust colored pillows were scattered all over it, and several large pillows with tassles at the corners were piled on the floor, apparently to be used to sit upon.

On one wall was a beautifully carved, delicate dressing table and stool on which stood two cut crystal lamps with gold paper shades. A chaise longue with gold velvet upholstery stood opposite it next to a large, but not heavy looking, carved rosewood armoire. A matching bureau was against the wall at the end of the room. Heavily starched, white, handmade lace curtains and heavy olive green silk draperies hung at the French doors. It was a lovely room.

Elizabeth shed her clothes quickly and wrapping her robe around her, which Fatima had laid

out across the foot of the bed, she went into the bathroom and drew a bath. The floor and walls of the bathroom were entirely tiled in yellow and white designs. The fixtures were lemon yellow. Adding some scented oil to the water, she sank into the bath with a sigh. She scrubbed herself thoroughly, enjoying the way her skin tingled, and when she was through, she rose from the tub and wrapped herself in one of the huge yellow bath towels that hung from racks, supported by golden dolphins holding the bar in their mouths. She dried herself briskly and walked into the bedroom.

There, puffed up like two blowfish, were Solomon and Sheba, backs arched, hair on end, teeth bared, hissing at something hidden behind the bed. Elizabeth walked toward them saying, "You old sillies! I know this is a new house, but you don't have to act quite so fierce."

She bent down to pat them, but they shook off her caress and went right on hissing and spitting and staring behind the bed.

"Well for heaven's sake, what's back there—"

A piercing scream left her lips at the sight that met her eyes. A large, blue-grey cat that could only have been Nicholas lay on its side, stiff and swollen to twice its normal size, its large green eyes glazed over. It was quite dead. Although she could hear Hamilton's footsteps on the stairs, she could

not stop screaming until she felt his arms around her.

"Oh God, Hamilton, look," she groaned and pointed to the floor behind her.

A small cry escaped him which sounded like, "that bastard," but she was not sure she had heard him correctly.

"Poor old fella. Who did this to you?" he murmured and reached a gentle hand to stroke the dead cat once.

"Is Ahmed here? Elizabeth, put your robe on, the servants will be here in a moment. Ahmed, take this cat out and bury him under the moon vine," he issued orders left and right.

Hamilton stood up as Elizabeth picked up her robe. Something scurried, sideways and crablike, out from beneath it and she screamed again. It was a large scorpion and it scuttled across the floor, its tail curved up over its back, ready to strike. It was heading straight for Solomon, who, it seemed, was more than ready to do battle with it.

"Oh, Hamilton, kill it, kill it," she sobbed, and watched horrified as the ugly little beast made straight for her cat.

Hamilton stepped forward calmly and brought his foot down on it a second before Solomon leaped.

"That does you, you little bugger," he growled

through his teeth at the dead scorpion. He kicked it once to make sure it was quite dead. He placed it in a waste basket and handed it to Fatima who left the room, carrying the basket apprehensively at arm's length as if at any moment the scorpion would come to life, spring from its grave, and with a sting, drag her into the grave too. Solomon and Sheba leaped up on the bed and sat surveying the room, apparently in the hope that more interesting creatures would appear.

"Darling, I'm sorry you had to find that. What an ugly thing to happen on your first day," Hamilton said, wrapping his arms around her.

"Do scorpions get in the house often?" she asked, sinking down onto the bed, her knees suddenly very weak.

"Actually, scorpions are never seen in the city. They don't become common sights until about sixty miles south of the city. It's too damp for them here on the coast. I don't understand what it was doing here. It was twice the size of the usual Moroccan creature, too," he said musingly.

"What if Nicholas hadn't met it first? I might have been killed. Oh Hamilton, who do you suppose put it there? Someone must have wanted at least to scare me to death. I'd be as dead as Nicholas if that thing had stung me," Elizabeth wailed.

"Don't be silly, Elizabeth. Who would want to

frighten you? It's queer, the creature's being here, I admit, but no one here wants to frighten you to death. Come, don't let this ruin things for you," he said, half irritated, half cajoling.

"But it's so obvious, Hamilton. If someone didn't put that creature in my room, how did it get here? You said yourself that they don't exist this close to the sea," she said.

"Elizabeth! I simply won't have this. Get hold of yourself. You're being silly!" he said.

She knew that she was being all but hysterical and that his sternness was by way of being the slap usually administered to hysterical people.

"I suppose I am being silly. But it was such a horrid sight, poor Nicholas all swollen up and dead. I'm afraid it has quite ruined my appetite," she said, trying to smile.

"Well, you must eat something. We've had almost nothing to eat all day, and I simply can't allow you to go to sleep with nothing in your stomach," he said.

"I really don't think I could eat a thing," she said.

"I tell you what. I'll have a table set here in your room for the two of us. That way you won't even have to dress. And Antoine has prepared the dinner of dinners. I'm sure your appetite will re-

turn when you smell the chicken tarragon. Come, what do you say to that?" he said.

"Well, Antoine *is* a genius. If he can bring back my appetite, I'll have to admit he can do anything," she said.

"Then you agree?" he asked, smiling.

"Yes. Have a table set up here, dear. But I think I'll lie down until dinner is ready, if you don't mind that concession to this horrible experience," she said.

"Of course. I'll run down to the kitchen and tell Antoine, and I'll send Fatima up to set the table," he said and bent down and kissed her forehead.

Elizabeth lay back against the pillows and Solomon and Sheba immediately crawled into her lap and lay looking up at her with wide blue eyes.

"You were scared too, weren't you? Well, I'll tell you a secret. I still am. Somebody here doesn't like us, and I'd feel a lot safer if I just knew who it was."

CHAPTER FIVE

"I feel so bloodthirsty, Hamilton, eating all this delicious food after that awful thing, but you were right. Antoine is a magician," Elizabeth said, putting her napkin beside her plate and leaning back in her chair.

"I'm glad you ate something, darling, bloodthirsty or not. Any sailor knows that food is the only antidote for sea sickness, no matter how ghastly the prospect of eating seems. I think it was true in this case too," he smiled at her across the table.

"Poor Nicholas, what an awful thing," she sighed.

"Yes, beastly," he said grimly.

He brightened quickly however, and added, "But, there is the fact that Natasha's about to throw a litter. Quite probably, one of them will grow up to take his place. She's due quite soon, actually."

"Solomon and Sheba do seem to get along quite

well with Natasha. I'm glad of that. Three hysterical cats in one house can be a bit trying," she said.

The servant brought their coffee and brandy in on a silver tray, and as Hamilton stirred a teaspoon of sugar into his espresso, he frowned.

"Darling, I don't mean to change the subject, but hadn't we best set a date for our wedding? I must admit I've been thinking in terms of this week sometime," he said.

"Oh, Hamilton! I couldn't possibly get married this week," she said with a shriek of surprise.

"Why not, have you something better to do?" he asked, smiling.

"Of course not, silly. But after all, this is my first wedding, and I'd like it to be a bit special. You can understand that, can't you?" she asked.

She watched the emotions flitting across his face and was unable to decipher them. Impatience? Annoyance? She knew that she loved him. She was quite sure that he loved her. And yet doubt nagged at her. She was no longer as sure that she should rush into this marriage as she had been aboard the Fer de Lance. When she thought about it, she knew really very little about him. He had acted, if not mysterious, at least covert, about several things. The incident in the hold of the ship was one thing, and the scorpion business had really frightened her. And he had minimized it so, mak-

ing her feel like a fool. She decided she would put the wedding off as long as she could.

"For instance, I'd love it if Maggie and Chase could be here. I know no one here but you, and I would like to have a maid of honor. Maggie'd never speak to me again, if I got married without her to dance attendance on me. And I've got no dress to wear. I'll have to have one made and that will take at least a week," she rattled on, hoping he had not caught her in the evasion.

"I seriously doubt that Chase and Maggie can arrange to come to Morocco on such short notice, Elizabeth," he said.

"But surely, I could call and ask them. Please, Hamilton, it would make me so happy if they could be here. They don't even know we're planning to be married. I'm sure they'll come," she pleaded.

Hamilton frowned at the floor and said, finally, "Well, if it will make you happy, dear, of course we can call them. Let's see, it's ten here, so that makes it four in the afternoon there. We might as well call them now and see if we ought to postpone the wedding long enough for them to get here."

He went to her bedside table and picked up the antique French telephone and carried it back to the dinner table. He dialed long distance and glanced up at her as he spoke in French to the

operator. She listened with half an ear as he placed the call, her thoughts returning to the horrid scene of the cat and the scorpion, to the confrontation on the ship with the hand who had seemed to be caught doing something he had wanted no witnesses for, trying to pinpoint the cause of her feelings of apprehension. She was considerably more frightened than she had been before the scorpion incident. She was afraid. Deep in her stomach she felt a fist of fear tightening.

Someone in this house wanted her either badly frightened, enough to drive her away, or dead. She could not imagine who it was. Hassan and Jonathan had been openly rude, if not hostile, but she could not believe the child capable of such cruelty, of inflicting such a hideous death on a dumb animal, or of being devious enough to try to frighten her with the scorpion. Hassan was another story, but he seemed almost too passive to take such an action as this. Certainly Hamilton could not have been responsible. No, it was unthinkable. Hamilton might be mysterious in some ways, but not cruel.

"The operator will call back when she's got them on the line, Elizabeth," his voice broke into her thoughts.

"How long do you think it should take?" she asked.

"Oh, anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour or so, depending on how busy the lines are between here and the States," he answered, looking at his watch.

"I've got a thing or two to take care of downstairs, but I'll come back up when I hear the phone ring. Or, better still, call down when you're through with Maggie and I'll pick up downstairs and we can both importune Chase. How's that?" he asked.

"Fine, Hamilton dear. I think I'll read then, until they call," she said, moving to her bed and picking up her book.

Hamilton kissed her lightly, a worried look appearing for a moment in his eyes, and left the room.

As soon as he had gone, Elizabeth jumped up, and feeling a little foolish, made a careful search of her room, looking under chairs, the bed, the bureau, and in the bathroom, behind the draperies, everywhere, for scorpions, snakes, spiders, any venomous creatures. Her skin crawled at the memory of the ugly black scorpion scuttling across the floor, and she leaped back to her bed, suddenly feeling very vulnerable. She remembered that, as a child, once one spider had been seen in the house, she remained apprehensive about the probable appearance of more for several days.

She had not read more than three pages when the phone jangled sharply. She picked it up and said the necessary words in French to the operator, and almost before she was through, she heard Maggie's excited voice on the other end.

"Lizzie? Can you hear me?" she shouted.

"As if you were in the next room, silly. Pipe down," Elizabeth laughed.

"What's all this about? I mean I don't get long distance calls from Tangier every day you know. What's going on?"

"Listen, Maggs, shut up a minute. I have to say this fast. Hamilton will be on the line in a minute. We're getting married, Maggie. . . . no, no squealing now, wait a minute . . . we're getting married, and although I love him, I'm scared suddenly. Some funny things have been happening and I'd just feel a lot better if you and Chase could be here. Do you think you can come, by this weekend?"

"Married? Scared? What funny things?" Maggie babbled.

"I don't have time to tell you now. Can you come? Quickly, before Hamilton gets on the phone downstairs," Elizabeth demanded urgently.

"Yes, of course we'll come, but I just wish I knew a little more," Maggie complained.

"I'll tell you all about it when you get here. Now, when Hamilton gets on the phone, make all kinds of excited chatter about weddings, okay?" Elizabeth said, and as soon as the words were out of her mouth, Hamilton's voice broke in on the downstairs telephone.

"Maggie? What do you think of our news?"

"Oh, Hamilton, I think it's terrific. And Lizzie's absolutely right. I never would have forgiven you if you'd gone ahead and done it without us," Maggie said, and Elizabeth breathed a prayer of thanks for Maggie's abilities as an actress.

"They can come, Hamilton. Isn't that terrific?" she asked, hoping there was lightness and excitement in her voice.

"Just wonderful," he answered, and she wondered if she just imagined that his voice sounded flat and unenthusiastic.

"Could you talk to Chase about the particulars, Hamilton? He's standing here muttering, 'what wedding, who's getting married' and things like that, right in my ear. Hold on a minute," Maggie said.

Elizabeth could hear that Maggie had put her hand over the mouthpiece and hoped she was explaining what little she knew to Chase so he would not give her away to Hamilton.

"You old dog, Hamilton Coggswell! Congratulations. When do you want us? What's the date?" Chase asked, his voice full of joviality.

"Chase? This is Lizzie," she broke in before Hamilton had a chance to answer. "Come as soon as you can. We've about set the date for next Saturday. That's a week, but it wouldn't be much fun if you missed all the pre-wedding events," she said.

"Well, this is Saturday. We'll have to get a sitter for the kids and get space on a plane, but I figure we could be there by Tuesday or Wednesday. How does that sound to you, Hamilton?" Chase asked, his big voice booming through the phone.

"Fine, fine, Chase. We'll meet you at the airport," and Elizabeth wondered if Chase could hear the lack of enthusiasm or if she just imagined it.

"Good then. We'll wire you on Monday whether to meet us Tuesday or Wednesday. See you then, old man. Hey, Lizzie, Maggie wants to say goodbye to you," he said.

"Lizzie, don't worry, we'll be there, dear. I'm so happy for you I could cry," she said cheerily.

"I'm so glad you'll be here, Maggs. I'll see you Tuesday or Wednesday then," she said, and they rang off.

Elizabeth heard Hamilton hang up the phone

downstairs and, with a sudden rush of fright, just as she was about to hang up, she heard a third extension click as its receiver was lowered gently into the cradle. She replaced the receiver on its hook and lay back against her pillows, breathing quickly, trying to swallow the fear.

She heard Hamilton's footsteps on the stairs.

"Well, that's settled," he said smiling and sat down on the foot of the bed.

"Yes, I'm so glad they could come. Thank you, dear, for letting me ask them," she smiled.

"What do you suppose Maggie meant by, 'Don't worry, we'll be there,' " he asked, looking down at his hands.

"Oh, before you got on the line, we were talking about bride-type apprehensions, and she was just reassuring me," she said.

"Of course. How silly of me. You didn't tell her about the scorpion, did you, dear?" he asked.

"No, I didn't. But would it have made any difference?" she asked, feeling suddenly cold.

"Of course not," he smiled broadly at her, "but Maggie doesn't seem to me to be the type to take scorpions and spiders in her stride. I was worried that if you had told her she'd spend the entire time she was here worrying that some heinous creature was about to descend upon her," Hamilton chuckled.

Feeling that she was about to lose the tenuous control she had over her fright, she said, "Hamilton, dear, I'm awfully tired. This has been a difficult day for me. Would you mind if I went to sleep?"

"Of course not, dear. I'll leave you alone now. Do you want me to get you a sleeping pill? It might help you sleep. I'll just go get one before I go to bed," he said starting for the door, what seemed to be real concern for her furrowing his brow.

"I don't think I'll have any trouble sleeping, dear," she said, and raised her face for his goodnight kiss. She hoped her lips felt warmer than they seemed to be as Hamilton kissed her.

"Good night then, darling. Sleep well," he murmured as he left the room.

Elizabeth lay there for a long moment after the door closed feeling her fear build into panic.

"Control yourself, young lady," she muttered between clenched teeth.

Purely by the exertion of self-control, she forced herself to relax. Who was that third person listening in on the telephone? Hassan? She had been sure he was leaving the house when she saw him just before the scorpion incident. But, if not Hassan, who then? Certainly not the children, they were both fast asleep. And the servants did not

speak enough English to have any desire to listen in on a telephone conversation.

As she lay, thoughts whirling through her head, she resolved to wait until she was sure Hamilton was asleep and then to do a bit of quiet exploring of this house she had not seen yet. She waited for an hour, her lights out, lying quietly, her hands busy with Solomon and Sheba who lay curled against her, wakeful, seeming to sense her fear.

When she had heard no noises in the house for half an hour she got up, slipped into her robe, and padded barefoot across her room to the door. She grasped the handle firmly and pressed down slowly, grateful for the well-oiled silence of all the house's fixtures, and swung the door inward. No lights illuminated the hall, but the moon cast its silver glow in through the windows on the small landing outside Hamilton's door, and she could see quite clearly.

She stepped carefully into the hall, closed the door behind her and tiptoed slowly down the hall. The tiled floor bore her weight silently. The door to the room next to hers stood open. The room was empty and seemed to be a playroom for the children. It was furnished with slightly undersized furniture and two Picasso lithographs of harlequins hung on the walls. An electric train was set up on a huge ping pong table at one end of the

room, its silvery tracks gleaming in the moonlight as they ran under bridges, through tiny forests, past silent towns and through tunnels.

She continued down the hall past two rooms, one on either side of the hall, which she was sure belonged to the children. The next three doors stood open and she could see at a glance that the rooms were empty; two of them guests rooms and one a billiard room. The big, heavy, squat billiard table looked like a menacing wild animal crouching in the dark ready to spring, and she hurried past the door.

The door to the next room was closed. She knew it was not Hamilton's room. His was across the hall from hers and up a half flight of stairs. She drew in her breath grimly, grasped the door handle firmly and pushed the door open. She found herself in a room about the size of her own. It was clear from the furnishings that its former occupant had been a woman. As she glanced about, her eye was caught by a flicker of white at the French doors, as if someone had slipped out the window into the garden as she had opened the door. She crossed the room silently, catching a brief but definite odor of a heavy, musky perfume. She was sure it was not the smell of any of the flowers in the garden. It was no natural odor, but a manufactured perfume.

She had smelled something similar in the hall as she opened the door to this room, but had ignored it. She stepped back into the hall, sniffing, and was aware that the perfume still hung there, like a heavy, opaque veil. She moved down to the end of the hall to a door and opened it slowly and looked through. It opened into another long hall, quite like the one she was standing in, but the perfume permeated the air there.

She went through, leaving the door open, and padded down the hall. It had four doors on either side down its length and a large, heavily carved double door at the end. It was toward this door that she moved as if mesmerized. As she drew nearer, the musky perfume hung more thickly in the air, and her heart beat deafeningly in her ears. She took both handles and swung the big doors open. The momentum of the doors pulled her along with them and she found herself standing in the middle of the room, not knowing quite how she came to be there.

She gasped at the sight that confronted her. A harem. That's all one could call it. The woodwork was gilded and thickly carved with animals and cherubim performing acts no cherub ought even to know about. The heavy glass lanterns shaped like pineapples hung from the ceiling and a dim light filtered through their red and blue glass. The

walls were entirely covered with thickly pleated, peacock blue brocade. The floors were covered from wall to wall by sumptuous Persian rugs. Huge down-filled pillows were littered about the floor, and beneath a canopy of heavy gold silk rested an enormous bed. It was larger than her own and much lower, as if the mattress were lying directly on the floor. Delicate gilded furniture, including a dressing table littered with silver and crystal toilette articles, and a chaise longue big enough to seat three people, was positioned about the room.

Elizabeth wandered through the room, touching things lightly as she went, and as she turned to approach the bed, the wall hangings directly in front of her parted, and an enormous woman confronted her.

Elizabeth stifled a scream and looked up at her. She was at least six feet two inches tall and quite slender. Her black eyes flashed with anger. Their lids were heavily made up with kohl. She wore a long white silk robe with loose sleeves; an amethyst glistened in the dim light from its place between her eyebrows. A lavender veil fell upon her bosom in graceful folds and was drawn tightly across the bridge of her nose. All Elizabeth could see of the woman's face were her eyes, and they flashed with anger. The musky perfume rose about the woman's form like a cloud of mist.

As she opened her mouth to speak, the woman loosed a torrent of Arabic hissings at her. She raised a jewel-heavy hand and pointed toward the door. Terrified and confused, Elizabeth realised that it would be hopeless to try and talk with her, so she simply turned and ran from the room.

The act of running seemed to give her fear new life, and as she ran, she became more and more frightened, like a child running up dark stairs at night. She bolted through the door at the end of the hall, closed it silently, and afraid that Hamilton would hear her panting or running, she slipped into the room in which she had first noticed the musky perfume. She sank into the chair by a desk, panting heavily, fear gripping her stomach in a vise, and her eyes fell upon a white French telephone, much like the one in her room. The phone gave her something to focus on, and as she looked at it, the fear slowly ebbed away. When her breathing had returned to normal, she slowly raised her hand and lifted the receiver from its cradle. It was connected, that was immediately and frighteningly obvious.

As she pressed the receiver to her ear, she heard Hamilton's voice, hard and mean, and queerly, almost frightened, quietly hissing in Arabic. She waited until the man at the other end replied and recognized his voice as belonging to the enormous

Arab with the broken nose she had met that afternoon in the Zoco Chico. She replaced the receiver slowly, hoping the telltale click would be lost in the hiss of the conversation, leaped to her feet, and left the room, closing the door behind her.

She ran lightly and noiselessly down the hall, glanced up the half flight of stairs and was assured of Hamilton's presence in his room by the thin ribbon of light beneath his door. She opened her door, praying that the cats would not betray her, and slipped in. Closing the door, she dropped her robe on a chair and slipped between the sheets on her bed and lay pretending to be asleep.

She lay there with her eyes closed and let her mind run over and over the events that had just occurred. The longer she thought the madder she became. Who did he thing he was, anyway, keeping a concubine stuck off in that sumptuous corner of the house. And he expected her to marry him. The gall of the man! It was incredible. She sat up in bed, her fear entirely dissipated and replaced by blazing anger.

She flounced out of bed, shoved her arms into the sleeves of her robe, flipped the light on and stalked over to the door ripping it open, heedless of the noise she might make. She stalked across the hall, took the six steps in two bounds and, without knocking, flung the door to Hamilton's room

wide. He sat in bed, a book in his hand, an amazed look on his face.

"Just who in hell do you think you are, Hamilton Coggswell?" she shouted.

"Elizabeth! Whatever has come over you? What is the matter with you?" he asked.

"Who is that woman? That . . . that . . . that concubine!" she spat the last word at him.

"Whatever *are* you talking about, Elizabeth? Come, sit here by me and tell me what has happened," he said in the tone of voice one usually reserves for dealing with lunatics.

"I can tell you perfectly well standing up, thank you."

"Well, please do. I am most curious."

"Well, I couldn't sleep, so I began exploring the house. It was rather fun in the dark, like exploring a haunted house, and I went through that door at the end of the hall and into that disgusting harem. And that dusky beauty, or whatever you call these women, leaped out at me from behind a curtain. How can you even *conceive* that I'll marry you with that woman in the house?" she ended in a shout.

She watched in utter amazement as Hamilton began to laugh. He laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks, holding up a finger periodically and signalling that she should bear with him until the

fit was past. She stood watching him, her arms folded across her breasts, growing more and more angry every time a new peal of laughter burst from him.

Finally he calmed down and, taking her by the arms, sat her down on the edge of his bed, and stood regarding her fondly.

"Big woman? Arab? Veiled?"

"Of course big and veiled. You ought to know," she said.

"Elizabeth, Elizabeth," he said, smiling fondly at her, "do I seem to you to be the type of man to keep a concubine? Do I seem dull enough to be capable of bringing home a bride with a concubine living in the same house?"

"Well, who is she, then?" she asked, beginning to feel very stupid.

"She belongs to Hassan. I suppose he has married her. He keeps her entirely to himself, in the way of Arab men, a situation called purdah. No other man ever sees her. When she walks in the garden she wears a heavy white haik and veil. He would kill her if she ever left these grounds. I suppose she hates him, although I don't know why I think that.

"That entire wing of the house is his. I never go in there. I haven't laid eyes on that woman in three

months. I'd begun to wonder if she was still alive. Now, do you see how silly you've been?"

"Oh, Hamilton, I feel like such a nincompoop, bursting in here all righteous indignation from head to toes," she said.

He started to laugh again, and finally she joined him. Soon they were rocking back and forth, weak with laughter, and unable to stop.

An hour later, back in her room, Elizabeth lay awake thinking about purdah. It wasn't a thing a woman chose. It was imposed upon her by a man. She wondered if the tall woman did hate Hassan.

She remembered the feeling she had had the first time she had entered this house, that it was a lovely, but inescapable prison. She reached out for Solomon, who crawled up and lay on her stomach comfortingly, purring lightly.

CHAPTER SIX

Matt and Jonathan swung ahead of her, seemingly oblivious to the fact that they were supposed to be guiding her, not trying to lose her in the crowd. They were taking her to some place Hassan had called the Phoenician graves.

She had encountered Hassan earlier that morning in the living room, and feeling slightly guilty for having invaded his private quarters, she had engaged him in a conversation.

"Have you any suggestions for sight seeing tours, Hassan?" she had asked, smiling brightly.

"If you're tired of the Casbah already," he had said, placing a sneering emphasis on the word 'already,' "there are a couple of museums and the Phoenician graves."

He had then turned on his heel, walked through the French doors into the garden and disappeared around the corner of the house.

She had stood there feeling like a fool for a moment, had decided she was silly to let Hassan

get on her nerves, and had gone to find Hamilton.

"I'm going to go out exploring, dear," she had said.

"All right, Elizabeth, but don't go alone. The Casbah is very confusing and you might get lost. Take the boys or Fatima with you," he had said.

"Is that really necessary?" she had asked.

"Well, I don't want you getting lost just yet. Actually, I'm glad you have something to do. I have a few business things to take care of today and now I won't have to feel guilty about leaving you to your own devices."

"Hey Matt, Jonathan, wait for me," she called to the two boys. "You're going a bit fast for an old lady like me. I'm not used to these hills," she panted as she caught up to them.

"You're not an old lady, Liz. You're too pretty to be an old lady," Matt said. "She's an old lady," he added, pointing to a lump of rags identifiable as a human form only by the hand which projected out from its middle.

Seeming to have heard their voices, the lump of rags stirred and assembled itself into a shape recognizable as a woman. As they drew nearer, she began to mutter something and to rock back and forth slowly. Elizabeth saw that she was blind; both her eyes were missing and her eyelids sank

back into the empty sockets. As they passed she dropped three dirhams into the woman's hand and went on quickly, shuddering at the sight of such abject poverty.

The streets were full of people, largely men, Elizabeth noticed, most of them carrying wicker baskets full of fruit and vegetables.

"Why do the men do the shopping, Jonathan?" she asked.

"Because their wives never leave their houses. It's a Moslem custom that no man allows another man to even see his wife," the child said.

"What happens during a party? Surely the women attend parties," she said.

"Women have their own parties. If a man has a party, his wife may cook the food, but it is served by a servant," he said, carefully avoiding her eyes.

They had come into a little square at the junction of three of the narrow Casbah streets. In the middle of the square was a fountain at which several Arab women were drawing water. One was washing some sheets in the basin of the fountain, and several children scampered about, splashing each other and shouting. As Elizabeth and the boys appeared, she noticed that a hush spread through the group. The woman looked up, the children stopped shouting and stared at her.

All at once, she was surrounded by the children, golden little half-naked things. They began patting her arms and saying "Bonjour, Madame, bonjour, Madame," over and over in soft little voices. Their hands were softer and warmer than any she could remember and their eyes darker. She felt suddenly as if she were taking part in some mystic ritual. She smiled down at them and gently extricated herself, and ran to catch up with Matt and Jonathan.

"What a queer thing," she said to Jonathan as she fell into step along side of them.

"They're just not used to seeing a woman alone in the streets and dressed like you are. Your arms and legs are bare, and their mothers wear long robes, even in the house," he said, his tone indicating that he thought she might be a more valuable person if she did the same.

"I thought you said that Arab women didn't go out in the streets," she said.

"The poor ones do. They have to. Their houses don't have running water," he said shortly.

"How much farther is it, Matt?" she called ahead to the younger child.

"Not far, Liz," he called back over his shoulder. He stopped and waited for her to catch up, and, slipping his hand into hers, he pointed ahead to a gate in the Casbah wall.

"Just through there and a ways down to the right," he said.

Jonathan had walked on ahead again, and Elizabeth took advantage of the distance between them to question Matt.

"Why doesn't Jonathan like me?" she asked.

"It's not that he doesn't like you. He misses our mother. He cries in the night a lot. Sometimes he has bad dreams too," he said.

"What kind of bad dreams?" she asked, her interest pricked.

"Well, I'm not sure, but one night he sat up and yelled, 'No, Uncle Richard, don't please!' and when I asked him what the matter was he started to cry. We turn right here," he said indicating a dirt road to their right.

Matt ran ahead toward Jonathan and Elizabeth walked along behind as they turned off the road and climbed through a break in the cobblestone wall that ran along the side of the road. They had entered what seemed to be a pasture; a donkey was tethered in one corner and there was evidence along the ground of larger animals. The donkey grazed peacefully, blinking its large beautiful and long-lashed eyes at them as they passed.

To the left ahead of her was a large white stucco villa, its green tile roof gleaming in the sun. It was surrounded by a high cobblestone wall in the mid-

dle of which was a heavy green steel gate. The sun glinted off something atop the wall and Elizabeth walked toward it to see what it was. As she got closer she saw that the top of the wall had sharply broken glass bottles imbedded in the concrete, jagged edges pointing upward. She shuddered at the sight and thought, *"I'll bet they don't have much of a problem with burglars."* she walked away, looking over her shoulder and could see several palm trees, great clumps of dates hanging from them, and a bougainvillea spilling over the wall, its purple blossoms thick and lovely.

She turned back in the direction Matt and Jonathan had gone and saw them standing on a large rocky surface. The Casbah, surrounded by its walls, was to her right, and she realized as she walked on that the Atlantic Ocean was straight in front of her.

"What a lovely place," she breathed, looking out over the cliff's edge to the beach below.

Arab women were wading in the shallow water and their shrieks as a wave soaked the bottoms of their pantaloons, wafted up to Elizabeth. The women held the skirts of their caftans high but the water was drenching their underthings. Children ran up and down the beach, picking up seashells, dragging each other into the water and splashing their mothers. The cliff was so high that Elizabeth

could not hear the sound of the waves breaking on the beach, and only occasional shrieks from the children and their mothers drifted up to her.

She looked up from the beach and saw, a quarter of a mile offshore, a string of small fishing boats heading out to sea. She thought they looked rather like a mother duck and her ducklings. Off on the horizon a big tanker moved ponderously down the Moroccan coast, probably delivering oil to Casablanca, and a freighter moved in the other direction, toward the Pillars of Hercules and the Mediterranean. She was suddenly pulled out of her reverie by the realization that someone was watching her. She turned and saw Jonathan regarding her silently, a peculiar expression in his eyes.

"Whose house is that?" she asked pointing to the villa on her right.

"Some rich American's, a lady I think," Matt answered for him. "She's hardly never there," he added.

"Ever there," she corrected and he smiled shyly at her.

"Those are the Phoenician graves," Jonathan said suddenly, pointing to rectangular patches of grass growing at regular intervals about the face of the rock.

"Certainly they can't be graves. There are no tombstones," she said.

"The graves were opened thousands of years ago. People stole all the gold and precious jewels and things out of them. They probably used the tombstones for building materials," he said sharply, impatience evident in his tone.

"You're very knowledgeable on the subject, I must say," she said, smiling, but he scowled and turned away.

She shrugged and knelt down to inspect the tombs more closely. She saw that the grass grew at a level about two inches below the level of the rock. She realized that the Phoenicians had carved deep, rectangular holes out of solid rock in which to entomb their dead.

"The people buried here must have been noblemen, don't you think, Jon?" she asked. "I mean do you think they'd have taken all the trouble to carve out these tombs for just anyone?"

"That's obvious to anyone with eyes," he said.

"How deep do you suppose these graves are?" she persisted.

The elder boy seemed to thaw a bit at this question. He hunkered down next to her and said, fingering the grass. "Well, I happen to know exactly. They're four feet deep."

"How do you know that, Jonathan?"

"Well, some friends of mine and I dug one up once to see if there was any buried treasure still left," he answered.

"Did you find any?" she asked, excited.

"I found two gold coins, a big one and a smaller one. We dug until we hit bottom, and the grave was four feet deep," he said.

"How fascinating," she said.

"You haven't noticed the other thing yet," he said, almost accusing her.

"What other thing?"

"They were very short people. I don't fit in one of these graves, I'm too tall. They must have been about as tall as Matt," he said.

She noticed that the length of the graves could not be more than four and a half feet.

"Perhaps they buried their dead curled up, as if they were sleeping," she offered.

Jonathan turned to look at her, admiration beginning somewhere behind his eyes.

"Hey, I never thought of that. Maybe you're right. So now we know that either the Phoenicians were short or they buried dead people curled up," he said, smiling for the first time since she had met him.

"What happened to the coins you found?" she asked, prompting the new found rapport.

"Well, I kept them for awhile. When I showed

them to Dad he said it would be nice to give them to the museum, so I did." they boy answered seriously. "They're in a little case all their own, and there's a plaque on it that says 'Gift of Jonathan Coggswell,' " he added.

"That's wonderful, Jonathan," she said and reached out and patted his hand. He shrank from her touch, his smile gone as suddenly as it had come, and stood up and moved away.

"I'm going to talk to the old donkey," he muttered as he went. He ran through the field, and as Elizabeth watched, his foot caught in a pothole and he fell. She started to rush after him, thought better of it and stayed where she was. She realized that any attention now would only drive the child further away from her, and all the ground they had gained that afternoon would be totally lost.

"Okay, Jonathan?" she called.

"I'm all right," he shouted back pulling himself to his feet.

It was obvious that he was not entirely all right. He was making a valiant attempt not to limp, but he had hurt his ankle. She decided that it was a minor injury or he would not be able to walk on it, and let him go on.

She looked around for Matt and saw him trying to climb a vine which grew close to the outside of

the wall around the mysterious villa. She ran over to him, and grabbing him about the waist, lifted him down from the vine.

"Matthew Coggswell, whatever do you think you're doing?" she demanded.

"I was going to climb up and peek into the garden," he said, all innocence.

"Hasn't anyone ever told you it's not nice to spy on other people?" she asked.

"Yes, but it wouldn't be spying exactly," the child answered.

"Of course it would. Why do you think it wouldn't be spying exactly?" she asked.

"Well, I've seen Uncle Richard going in there," he mumbled, looking down at his hands.

"What difference does that make?" she persisted, frowning sternly, although the mention of Hassan's name had aroused her interest.

"Well, if Uncle Richard goes in there, the house must belong to somebody we know, don't you think?" he said, smiling triumphantly at the perfection of his logic.

"Matt, do you think it's all right to spy on someone just because you know him?"

"Well, I spy on Uncle Richard a lot, but I never saw the man before that he went in there with," he

said, crestfallen at the lack of impression his logic had made.

"Well, spying on people is definitely not nice, whether you know them or not. Now run and play with Jonathan," she said, resisting an urge to pump the child about Hassan and putting the temptation as far away as possible.

As the child ran toward his brother, it was only the knowledge that the top of the wall was covered with jagged pieces of glass that kept her from hoisting herself up for a peek.

"Don't be silly, Elizabeth, there's nothing to see," she muttered. Hassan could have any number of reasons for visiting that house. None of them concerned her in the least and none of them were more sinister than a visit to a friend.

The children seemed busy playing with the donkey. Jonathan had boosted Matt up on its back. Leaving them to their own devices for a moment, she turned back toward the graves. She walked across the one nearest her, stepping down into it and standing on it a moment. She remembered something Sylvia had told her once when as children, they had been playing in a cemetery.

"Stepping on the ground beneath which the dead are asleep is a bad omen, Lizzie. Only walk between the graves."

She shuddered and jumped out of the slight depression in the rock. Sylvia had been interested in the occult even as a child, but Elizabeth had never given it any credence. She wondered why stepping in the grave had made her feel so queer, and decided she was just edgy.

She walked toward the edge of the cliff, and stood looking down at the sea, trying to calm herself. As she watched, a school of dolphins broke the water, leaping high in the air in a graceful arc. The sight delighted her and she stepped nearer the cliff's edge, watching for them to break again.

"Don't, Lizzie!"

A child, she was not sure which, had screamed a warning, and she stood rooted to the spot as she heard rapid footsteps approaching. A small hand grabbed hers and yanked her roughly back from the cliff's edge, and she turned and looked down into Jonathan's tear-stained face. He was crying freely, and yanking her farther and farther away from the cliff.

"Jonathan, whatever is the matter?" she asked.

"Don't ever go near the edge of that cliff," he said, trying to gain control over his tears.

"Were you afraid I'd fall, dear?" she asked, as she took a handkerchief from her pocket and handed it to him.

He wiped his eyes and blew his nose once hard into the soft fabric.

"People fall from there," he said shortly, not looking at her.

Matthew came running up to them, panting hard from the effort and said, "What's the matter, Lizzie? Were you going to fall like. . . ."

"Shut up, Matt," Jonathan said sharply.

"Fall like who?" Elizabeth asked.

"Nothing, nothing you'd be interested in," Jonathan said.

"Wait a minute, Jonathan. Fall like who? You were obviously afraid I'd fall. Why?" she demanded.

"Our mother fell off this cliff," Matt said, looking at Jonathan defiantly.

"Our mother used to come here all the time," Jonathan said tonelessly.

"Yes," Elizabeth said, urging him on.

"This was one of her favorite places. She used to come here to read. Sometimes she brought her easel and painted here. Sometimes she just sat here doing nothing. One day she didn't come back," he said.

"Do you know what happened?" she asked.

"Some fishermen found her body down on the beach. They said she fell. She knew how dangerous

it was to go near the edge. She wouldn't have gone too close," he said.

"You think somebody pushed her, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "I wouldn't ever come here alone," he added, and began to walk toward the road.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

The incident of the dead fly had kept Elizabeth awake most of the night. Unlike the thing with the scorpion, this could not have been an accident. This, however, was one one aspect, although it was the one which frightened her most.

She had not told Hamilton about it, because although it could not have been accidental, he so often poo-pooed her avowals that someone was trying to frighten her. During the night, as she sat awake, she had begun to wonder if his constant refusal to admit even to the possibility that someone was trying to frighten her did not implicate him in the series of "accidents" that had occurred.

As she walked on the terrace outside her bedroom waiting for him to join her for breakfast, she turned the thing over in her mind trying to come up with an explanation that did not implicate him. She could think of no logical reason for him to want to frighten her or to cause her serious harm. But neither could she come up with a reason for his blindness about the import of the scorpion and

Nicholas. She was sure she owed her life to Nicholas. Hamilton seemed to feel that the scorpion's presence in her room was an accident, and one not to be taken very seriously.

She had come home from her walk to the Phoenician graves late the afternoon before, and had gone straight to her room. She had sent Fatima to the kitchen for a glass of warm, sweetened milk, hoping it would calm her nerves. As she waited, she had drawn a hot bath and was soaking in the tub when Fatima had returned with the milk. She had taken the glass from her, placed it on the edge of the tub and dismissed her.

As she sat letting the hot water soak into her bones, a fly had lit on the edge of the glass. It had crawled down into the milk before she could shoo it away, and grimacing with disgust, she had been about to call Fatima to get her another, when the fly had simply died and fallen onto the saucer, its legs in the air.

She had been suddenly reminded of the first day when the bee had crawled into her mint tea and drowned. But, the milk had not been hot enough to kill the fly as the tea had the bee. A chill ran over her as she remembered the words she had said to Hamilton as they sat in the Zoco Chico.

"If I were prone to that sort of thing, I'd take that as a bad omen."

Something like that. Omen or not, that had been an accident. This too had been an accident, in a sense. The fly would not have died had it not sipped the milk. She might have died if it had not. Poison. She could not believe it, yet it seemed the only answer. Flies certainly did not die from drinking milk.

She had dried herself off, slipped into her pink robe and sniffed the milk. Unable to detect any odor, she had flushed it down the toilet. She had not mentioned the incident during dinner or afterward.

Now as she walked along the terrace waiting for him, she wondered if she looked as haggard as she felt. She had spent most of the night sitting in a chair with the lights out, both hoping and fearing that someone would sneak into her room and do violence to the pillows she had arranged beneath the bedclothes.

She had heard the muezzin give the first of the five daily calls to prayer and had reckoned the time at 3:30 or 4 a.m. Deciding that it would be at least better to know for certain that someone was trying to harm her, she had crept through the silent house to the kitchen, hoping to find some evidence of the poison there.

The sugar bowl had seemed the logical place to start. She had dipped her finger in it, tasted the

white substance that stuck to it, and had found it to be sugar. Next she had moved a chair under the cupboards and climbed up on it to search there. She had come up with small boxes of everything from anise to cumin before she found what she was looking for.

Way to the back of a high shelf she had found a newly opened box labelled ARSENIC. The box contained careful directions for the poisoning of rats printed out on the back. She had replaced it on the shelf, her heart beating heavily in her chest, had replaced the chair she had been standing on, and crept back to her room. She had been afraid that the noise of her heartbeats would awaken the entire household.

Arsenic. It was white and so would not be noticed in the milk. Its slightly bitter flavor would be disguised by the sugar. She would surely be dead or very ill if that fly had not risen to the poisoner's bait first.

The first grey light of dawn had whitened the sky by the time she got back to her room. She had removed the pillows and propped them up at the head of the bed and had gotten into bed still in her robe. She had pulled the covers up under her chin and had sat there shivering until Fatima had come in to get her up for breakfast.

If Maggie and Chase don't get here soon, I

won't be eating many more breakfasts, she thought as she walked down the terrace.

When she reached its end, she stood looking down at the shining arc of Tangier's harbor. The muezzin was calling the faithful to prayer with the words she had learned meant, "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his only prophet." Over and over, the blind old muezzin intoned these words while a white flag waved over his head from the flag pole atop the minaret.

She had been in Tangier less than a week, and this ritual, repeated five times a day, had already become a part of her life. She no longer noticed it consciously as she had during the first few days, yet she knew, should it suddenly cease, or should the pattern suddenly change, she would notice it instantly. It had grown into the fabric and rhythm of life in Tangier for her. It was an eerie sound, and because it was issued from the minaret of every Mosque in the city simultaneously, it sounded as if it came from everywhere and nowhere.

As she looked down at the harbor, she thought perhaps she would go swimming that afternoon. She had been in Tangier several days and had not yet been near the beach. She watched the tiny fishing boats bobbing in the harbor, and slowly realised that it somehow looked different, something

had been added or taken away and she was unsure what it was.

A freighter was at the jetty, the usual police boats and fishing boats were there, but something was wrong. The Fer de Lance! It was missing from its slip. She wondered who had taken it, where and why. The ship was one of Hamilton's most prized possessions, and she was sure he did not lend it lightly. Perhaps he was out in it himself.

She turned and walked back up the terrace, surveying the garden as she went. As she walked her mind left the fact of the missing boat and involved itself in the riot of color before her.

The mimosa was yellow with tiny blooms and the ground beneath the tree was covered with the blossoms that had fallen in the night. The bougainvillea covered most of one wall, spilling its purple blossoms up and over the wall like a huge wave breaking against a high sea wall. The huge deep purple morning glories were open, their fat faces turned up to the sun. The morning glory vine had grown up the trunk of a plane tree and it was now so entwined with the tree's branches, that its blossoms bursting out over the leaves of the tree made the tree appear to be in purple bloom. The great red and yellow canna stood tall in neat rows as did the zinnias and marigolds, rust and gold and pur-

ple. The moon vine or belladonna tree looked like a Christmas tree entirely bedecked with golden trumpets, so thick were its blossoms. Bees buzzed in and out of the flared mouths of the blossoms, their flight mindless and erratic, seemingly drunk on the nectar.

She wondered idly why the vine was called the belladonna tree. Belladonna, she knew, was a variety of the deadly nightshade, and she wondered if this lovely vine had any poisonous properties.

"Good morning, Elizabeth," Hamilton called cheerily as he ran down the short flight of steps from his terrace to hers. He looked extremely handsome and carefree, his blue oxford cloth shirt open at the throat, his gray flannels pressed, his arms held out toward her. He did not look like a man who had tried to poison her. She went into his embracing arms and she allowed herself to be held for a moment before they sat down opposite each other at the small round table that had been set on the terrace.

A pale blue linen cloth and napkins set off the white and blue china, and the silverware gleamed in the sun. A tall silver pot of coffee and a small, fat pot of tea, silver sugar bowl and cream pitcher, and crystal glasses of fresh orange juice were on the table. She had switched her glass of juice for

Hamilton's before he came down, and she watched in a kind of horror as he downed it in one draught. She drank her own when he had finished.

"Tea as usual, Elizabeth?" he asked, smiling at her, his hand poised over the teapot.

"Coffee today, I think. Here, let me do it. You'll spoil me waiting on me all the time," she answered, pouring first his cup, then her own.

"Two sugars, Hamilton?" she asked.

He nodded and she added the sugar to his cup before passing it to him. She then added sugar to her own cup and placed it to the right of her knife and spoon.

As she stirred the coffee she asked, "Where's the Fer de Lance, Hamilton? I noticed this morning while I was waiting for you that it's gone."

"He might have asked me," Hamilton muttered.

"Who?"

"Oh, Hassan. He often takes the ship when I'm not using her, but I'd prefer it if he'd ask me first."

"Why do you let him take it at all?" she asked.

"Well, he runs a small import-export business to eke out the money I give, which isn't enough to keep him in gambling money. It keeps him out of the casinos, at least some of the time, so, although I expect he'll run her aground someday, I let him take her occasionally."

"How badly does he gamble, anyway?"

"It's always worst during the season when the casino's full of big money. Last month I bailed him out of a $15,000 loss. That's the worst yet. You can see why I let him take the ship," he smiled and picked up his newspaper.

Ahmed appeared in the doorway with a silver tray. He placed it on a side table and removed the covers from two china bowls which matched the china of their cups and plates. Elizabeth was relieved to see that one of the bowls contained steaming scrambled eggs speckled with bits of crumbled bacon and that the other held hot, buttered toast. At least if she were going to be poisoned at this meal, Hamilton was too.

Ahmed served the bacon and eggs and toast, asked if anything more was needed, and when Hamilton indicated that there was nothing more, he withdrew silently.

As she picked slowly at her eggs, she wondered at Hassan's sudden and unannounced disappearance for several days on the morning after someone had tried to poison her. She could not decide whether or not to tell Hamilton about the poisoned milk and as she turned this dilemma over in her mind, a cunning scheme occurred to her.

"Are there rats or mice in the house, darling?" she asked.

He looked up frowning from his paper.

"With what I pay an exterminator every month, there had better not be," he said. "Why?"

"What does the exterminator use?" she asked, ignoring his last question.

"He shoots some sort of gas that is non-toxic for humans, into every hole and crevice in the house and then plugs them up."

"He doesn't use poison then?"

"Sometimes, yes. But the rats seem to develop an immunity after a while. Hasn't used it in some time. But, what is all this?"

"I suppose he brings his own equipment, poison and gas and things?"

"With two children in the house, we certainly don't keep a supply of that sort of thing lying about. What is bothering you, dear?" he insisted, finally.

"Well, I heard a scrabbling noise in my wall last night, and I thought it might be rats. After that scorpion business, I'm a little jumpy, I guess," she said.

"Why all this interest in methodology? If there are rats in this house, I'll call the exterminator and get him over here. Surely you weren't going to try to deal with them yourself?"

"No, I just wondered," she answered vaguely.

He frowned at her for a moment and then returned to his paper.

Well, if he had tried to poison her, he certainly now knew that she was aware of it, and if he hadn't, she had just annoyed him with her vagueness.

"Do you have anything to do today, Hamilton? I thought if you weren't busy, we could go to the beach," she said after a few moments.

"Elizabeth, dear, I have been deserting you lately, haven't I? Well, I'm afraid I'll have to again today, at least for a few hours."

"Oh, Hamilton, what is it that is so important?" she said rather peevishly.

"Well, I have to extract an English girl from a messy situation she's got herself into. Her father's a friend of mine and although he doesn't know about this, I feel responsible to him for her welfare while she's here," he answered.

"What kind of messy situation?" she asked.

"Well, these young people come to Tangier, English and Americans, mostly, because they hear it's an exotic and exciting city. Some of the girls get themselves involved with Arab men, and pretty soon they find themselves in over their heads. They are being kept in what amounts to Purdah, can't get out of the house and so on."

"If she can't get out of the house, how did you find out about her?" Elizabeth asked.

"A friend of hers came to me yesterday while

you were out and told me that the girl hasn't been seen in more than two weeks. The last person she had been seen with was an Arab she had been dating. The girl told me the Arab's name, and I put two and two together.

"Luckily I'm in a position to put considerable pressure on him. He owes me a good deal of money. I shouldn't be too long actually. I'll just pick her up, get her luggage and see her safely aboard the ferry for Gibraltar. Her parents are there, and I've wired them to expect her. When I've made sure she sails with the ship, I'll walk over to the beach to meet you if you like."

"Okay, sounds fine. Do these things happen often, Hamilton?" she asked.

"More often than you'd think. It's quite surprising actually, the frequency with which these things occur."

"Perhaps that's the origin of all the white slave stories that pop up from time to time in the yellow press in the States," she mused.

"Doubtless. These little girls get back home and tell their friends about being held prisoner by a dark, mysterious Arab, when in fact they've been very willing prisoners, at least until they realise that that is, in fact, what they are."

"It gives me the willies to think about it," she said, a shudder running through her body.

"Well, you don't have to worry about it, do you dear," he smiled. "When you get to the beach, you must rent a cabana to change your clothes in. All the cafes along the beach have them, but the Ibn Batouta is the nicest. I know the owner, a nice chap named Alan, an American. I'll meet you there at about two, all right?" he asked.

He leaned down and kissed her cheek, and with a last pat on the top of her head, he walked out through her bedroom and into the hall beyond. She heard the front door closing after him.

Solomon rubbed against her legs and she lifted him into her lap and scratched beneath his chin. He sat quietly looking into her face, seeming to sense that she was disturbed. Sheba leaped lightly onto the table, and sat looking at her, ready to jump down if she were reprimanded.

"You silly. Fatima would have a fit if she saw you up there," she said to the little cat and reached out and patted her.

All I can do is act normally and hope Chase and Maggie get here soon, she thought.

She picked up both cats and carried them into her bedroom and deposited them on her bed. Natasha was already firmly ensconced there. and the two Siamese sat down near her, as if to console her in the loss of her mate.

She opened her armoire and chose a blue gabar-

dine skirt, blue sandals and a blue and green Liberty print blouse. When she had dressed, she tied her hair back with a blue silk scarf. She wrapped her orange bikini in one of the yellow towels, patted all three cats, and without a word to Fatima, left the house.

She knew that so long as she kept going down hill, she would eventually get to the Zoco Chico, and from there, the Avenida di Spagna was easy to find. She walked slowly, trying to remember landmarks so she could begin to get around the Arab quarter by herself. However, almost every corner looked the same as the one that had preceded it, and although she was not lost, she was sure she would never recognise these streets again.

She turned a corner and found herself at the head of a long wide flight of stairs, a terraced street really. It seemed as good a way to go as any and she began to walk down. Beggars crouched on every other step chanting the traditional words she knew to mean "Alms for the love of Allah." She wondered whether that meant that Allah was sure to love the man who gave alms, or that men should give alms because they loved Allah. At any rate, she knew that beggars did not go hungry in this country, because whichever of the two interpretations were true, the Moslems did share with the poor.

Hooded, biblical looking figures rushed around her as she descended the steps slowly. They were mostly men, their baskets bulging with fruits and vegetables from the market place. A water seller stood at the foot of the steps, ringing a large brass bell. He was an old man the color of walnut, a white stubble of beard on his chin. He wore an enormous straw hat, almost like a Mexican sombrero, and a knee length white wool jalaba with short sleeves. His legs were well muscled and slim and brown and she marvelled at their youthful appearance.

His goatskin, swelled with water, was slung over one shoulder and a huge leather money pouch over the other. A leather apron kept the front of his jalaba dry as he poured water. Several beautiful and highly polished brass cups and bowls hung from his person on an intricate system of brass chains.

When she reached him, she stopped and he swung the long brass tube with a spigot on the end out from under the goatskin and poured her out a bowl of water. Before giving her her water, he carefully sloshed a quantity around in the immaculate cup and threw it out. She took the cup and drank and found the water cool and refreshing with a slight but not unpleasant leathery taste. She paid him two francs and walked on. She found

the water sellers and the almond vendors among the most pleasant of the street merchants.

She turned around for a last glimpse of him, and as she did, she saw a tiny, thin Arab in a navy blue jalaba duck into a doorway. He looked familiar to her somehow. She was sure she had seen him before. Perhaps the day before on the way to the Phoenician graves. Yes. That was it. She had turned around to look back into the little square in the Casbah where the women were doing their laundry in the fountain, and he had been walking along some distance behind her and the children.

She had only noticed him because he was so small. He looked like a doll dressed in Arab clothes she had seen in a souvenir shop window. How queer that he should be behind her again. Well, Hamilton had said that Tangier was like a small town, that one kept meeting the same people no matter where one went. She shrugged her shoulders and continued down hill toward the Zoco Chico, feeling strangely safe in the crowded streets.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The beach had been lovely, and she was glad she had taken advantage of it, because she knew she would not have much free time during the next few days. She had an appointment this morning with a tailor in the Medina for the white velvet caftan she would wear for her wedding, and Maggie and Chase had wired that they were due to arrive the next afternoon.

For the first time since her arrival in Tangier, she had been able to relax on the beach the day before. The Ibn Batouta had been a lovely place. It was a large white stucco building covered with morning glories and bougainvillea. Its one large room was furnished with a bar and stools and a clutch of tables. It was painted bright orange and the tables and wrought iron chairs were painted black. Out in front, a straw awning had kept the hot Mediterranean sun off several tables, and on the beach were more tables, arranged beneath huge black and orange striped umbrellas. Eliza-

beth suspected that Alan was a Princeton man, and she had been right.

She had an omelette and a salad for lunch and sat beneath an umbrella reading until Hamilton arrived. He loomed up over her suddenly, a long shadow on her book, tan and blond in his bathing suit. Without a word he had taken her hand and led her into the turquoise water. They had played and raced each other to the raft in the warm water for what seemed like hours.

Somehow, she realised now, she had been free from worry, during that long afternoon, about the dangers that seemed to lurk all about her. They seemed less immediate on the beach than they had at the house that sat high on the hill, cloaked in the mystery of the Casbah.

She had been amazed at the number of women and children on the beach. The women sat on the sand wrapped in their jalabas and from the vantage point of the terrace of the Ibn Batouta, the beach seemed to be growing a rich crop of rounded white toadstools. Hamilton told her that only the rich men could afford to keep their wives in Purdah, and that although these poor people couldn't afford this nicety of Arab culture, she would never see one of these women remove either her veil or her jalaba on the beach. He had added that the

only place one could see them was on the roofs of their houses.

"Although you can walk on the roof of your own house, and read and go about your affairs, it is considered rude, if not a crime, to watch other women at work on their roofs. The roof is considered part of the house, and watching the women do their laundry is as rude as looking in their windows," he had said.

Her reverie, as she sat at her dressing table, her hairbrush raised, was interrupted by Fatima, who announced in French that it was time to go to the tailor. She gave a last swipe to her hair and stood up, smoothing the skirt of the blue linen frock she had decided on. It was high necked with a slightly flared skirt, and the hem and sleeves were bound in white linen. Her initials were embroidered in the center of the yolk of the dress. Her shoes and handbag were white. She hoped, as she glanced at herself in the mirror, that she was presentable enough for an Arab tailor.

Fatima had taken her measurements to the tailor the day before, and he was to have the dress basted together for the fitting. She had wondered whether the tailor was possessed of sensibilities too delicate to do the measuring himself, or whether it was not seemly for a lady to allow a strange

man to pass his hands over her body. She thought it was probably the latter.

As they walked out of the gate of the house and down toward the Place de Casbah, Elizabeth took up a position behind Fatima. They descended a short flight of steps and walked through the gate in the wall of the Casbah, the wall which had been there for who knew how many thousands of years. Fatima did not speak to her on the way, and indeed maintained her position ahead of Elizabeth. She was a short round figure in her anonymous black jalaba, the green chiffon of her veil blowing over her shoulder occasionally.

The shop was not far into the Medina below the Casbah, and when they reached it, Fatima waited on the doorstep while Elizabeth went in. She wondered who was going to translate for her.

It was a large square room, and there were not one, but three tailors, sitting cross-legged on a platform. She was reminded instantly of the three monkeys who saw, heard and spoke no evil. The tailor in the corner nearest the wall was working on a man's jalaba, and indeed his glasses were so thick she was sure he could see no evil. He could barely see the thread his needle carried. He held the fine white wool on his lap and plied the needle rapidly in and out of the material. The thread in the needle went through the material and stretched

in two long loops from the cloth to a boy who stood near the door of the large room holding the loops taut over the thumb and forefinger of each hand. As the tailor sewed, the boy rapidly and rhythmically switched the loops from one hand to the other so that the threads crossed. Elizabeth saw that in this way, the seams of the jalaba were not so much sewed as woven together.

As she entered, all three men stopped their work, the boy relaxed gratefully against the door post, and each of them greeted her in French. The man nearest her, a slight little fellow who wore tiny round horn-rimmed spectacles, put his work aside, got up and went to a cabinet along the wall from which he extracted a large bundle wrapped in white tissue paper. He unfolded it carefully and held up her caftan. It was more nearly finished than she had expected.

Only the sleeves and the side seams had been basted, the rest was complete. It had a high, almost Chinese, neck and collar richly embroidered in pearls and brilliants. The embroidery ran down the front of the garment and around the hem in a wide band. It buttoned almost all the way down to the hem with pearl buttons and the loops through which they fit were woven of white silk thread. She was going to need a buttonhook to get into and out of this dress. It was ankle length, and the em-

broidery around the hem was a pattern of fat roses and leaves. The narrow sleeves had the same pattern down their length and were tight, buttoned with white pearl, at the wrist. It was without doubt the loveliest wedding dress she had ever seen, and she hoped passionately that she would have a chance to wear it.

The tailor unbuttoned enough of the neck buttons for her to be able to slip the dress on over her head and helped her as she did so. The silk lining of the dress rustled against her linen as it slid down, and she turned to look in the mirror. The tailor signalled to Fatima who walked over, and with a buttonhook he provided, did up the buttons. She looked up, and breathed a long sigh at the loveliness of the dress she beheld. It fit as though she had had ten fittings. The hem gently brushed the tops of her shoes, the sleeves fell just to her wrists. She saw that some modifications from the traditional caftan had been made. It fit tightly to just under her bosom and fell from there in long graceful folds to the hem. It had been cleverly cut fuller in the back to give the illusion of a train. It was perfect, and she felt like a princess in the dress.

The tailor bustled about her, pins in his mouth, poking here and there. He tightened the fit of the sleeves at the shoulder, looked her up and down,

nodded his satisfaction, and stepped back to allow Fatima to help her out of the dress.

She thanked him as profusely as she could in French, and all three tailors, who had not resumed their work during this time, nodded and replied. Fatima extracted a promise from them to have the dress delivered to the house the next afternoon. As she and Fatima walked down the steps to the street, Elizabeth realised that the entire neighborhood had witnessed the fitting. People were standing about in a semi-circle absolutely silent, smiling broadly and nodding approval as she went down the few steps.

She followed Fatima through the crowd to the corner where she stopped her and said in French that she was not yet ready to return home, but was going for a walk and would not need her any longer. Fatima replied that she had been ordered not to leave her alone in the streets. Elizabeth assured her that she would straighten it out with Mr. Coggswell and the little Arab woman set off reluctantly toward home.

Elizabeth was going to explore the Medina and buy gifts for Chase and Maggie. She turned down a narrow street, so narrow that the houses almost met overhead, and although it was noon, she felt as if she had suddenly walked into early dusk.

There did not seem to be any shops in the street, although beaded curtains, and a strong odor she had come to recognize as kief, told her there were cafes.

The street led into a small square which was full of fruit vendors. The peasant women, or djeblis as they were called in Arabic, were very colorful in their candy-striped shawls and skirts, each with a baby tied to her back in a sling. Their fruits and vegetables were spread out about them on white sheets on the street. There were bananas, dates, fig purple and green, carrots, melons, bright yellow cassavas, and red and green peppers.

Five streets lead out from this square and she could not decide which to take. It did not seem to make any difference, so she struck out to the left and found herself walking down a street of cloth merchants, the silks and woolen goods hanging in festoons from the doorways and wires strung across the street. Their bright colors were all the advertisement that was necessary.

Turning left off this street, she found herself in the Street of the Running Hare in front of a small antique shop, or so its multi-lingual sign proclaimed. She had learned that almost anything sold in Tangier is a "genuine antique" at least to the vendor. She looked in the window for a moment and spotted a lovely string of amber beads.

She had seen cheap imitations all over the city, all touted as "genuine antiques" and all simply genuine plastic. These were the first real amber beads she had seen. Maggie would love them, if they weren't ridiculously overpriced.

She entered the shop and the owner stood up, a tall. light-skinned Arab with striking green eyes. She was reminded for an instant of Nicholas whose eyes had been just this color. He wore a white jalaba, its hood hanging down over his left shoulder, a fashion in Tangier she had noticed, and a red fez.

"You are interesting in the amber, I think," he said quaintly, bending toward her.

She smiled at the expression, remembering a Frenchmen who had once informed her that he was charming to make her acquaintance. She wondered frivolously whether she would be interesting in the amber, and nodded her head. She knew she was in for a bargaining session if she decided to take them. She had decided that the best tactic was to bargain briefly, and when the man proved unbending in his price, to walk out of the shop.

He took the amber beads out of the window and brought them to her as if he were bearing some frightfully valuable and fragile item, his eyes riveted to her face, trying to read there how much she was willing to pay. She kept her expression

blank as she examined the beads. They were indeed authentic and quite beautiful. She put them down on the counter and began to examine the antique handgun made of iron and wood with a silver and pearl inlaid grip.

"How much is the gun, please?"

"Madame is not liking the beads?"

"Yes, they are quite lovely, but I want to know the price of the gun."

"One hundred and fifty dirhem, Madame."

That was $50 and she knew that was far too expensive.

"And how much are the beads?"

"Ninety dirhem, Madame," he said hopefully.

"Ridiculous! I will pay fifty dirhem for the gun and eighty for the beads."

He raised his hands, palms upwards and shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, Madame. You are laying waste to my shop with the insult of such an offer."

His eyes drooped mournfully at her.

"And you, sir, are insulting me by assuming that I am a stupid tourist who will pay anything for these trinkets."

"Ah, Madame." Again the shrug and the drooping eyelids, this time an apologetic gesture.

"Perhaps 120 dirhem for the gun and 150 for

for the beads," he said, smiling as if he had offered to give them to her.

"No. I am afraid not. One hundred and fifty dirhem for both, and not a dirhem more," she said.

He looked at her in horror, his expression indicating that he would be forced into bankruptcy and his children would have to take to the streets if he accepted her offer.

Taking her cue from this expression, she turned and started to walk from the shop. As she expected, she heard his slippered feet slapping hurriedly along the floor after her.

"Please, Madame. One hundred and sixty dirhem for both the miraculous gun and the beads," he pleaded.

"Sold," she said, turning around to face him triumphantly.

He wrapped the beads and the gun carefully, a look of utter despondency on his face. *You old faker*, she thought. He was still making a hundred per cent profit on this deal. She took the package from him and walked out of the shop.

She turned right and started on down the street again. She had not gone more than thirty steps when she realised that she had no idea how to get back to the Casbah. The tailor was near to the Casbah wall, but she could not remember exactly

where his shop was, and she had no clear idea how to get home from the shop should she be lucky enough to find it.

"Well, you can't go wrong if you keep going uphill," she muttered.

Turning right, she started up a street that seemed to be headed in the right direction. As she walked along, however, she realised that the street had turned back on itself and was no longer inclining upwards. She turned off it onto a narrower street which she followed along until it ended in a small square with the inevitable fountain. She took a street to the left and walked into it, decided it was the wrong way and returned to the square. As she entered the square again, she saw the small man in the navy blue jalaba disappearing down a street on the other side of the square.

She shivered with fright, wondering why he turned up so often, turned quickly to her right and ran down the narrow alley. The faster she ran, the more frightened she became, and when a small brown hand reached from a doorway and grabbed her arm she gave a little shriek of fright. She looked down and saw that the hand belonged to little Mohammed, the boy she had met in the Zoco Chico the first morning.

"Hello. How are you? Fine?" he said, still holding her arm.

"No, Mohammed, I'm not fine," she said, and could see by his expression that he had never encountered that answer before.

"Is everything okay?" he asked, not sure how to deal with the fact that it wasn't.

"No. I'm lost," she said.

"Oh. American lady lost. Okay now. I will take you to the Zoco Chico."

"But, I don't want to go to the Zoco Chico," she wailed.

"Yes. You do. I saw Mr. Coggswell shortly near there," he said, his American accent holding up, but his grammar folding under the strain. "You will go to the Zoco Chico and I will find for you Mr. Coggswell, okay?"

Without waiting for an answer, he took her hand and led her down the street, made a right onto a short block and turned left at the end of it. She could see the Zoco Chico at the end of the street. The noise of television sets blaring Arab news casts in the cafes burst upon them as they entered the square. Mohammed steered her toward the Cafe Central and sat her down at a table. He said something to the waiter in Arabic and smiled at her.

"Okay now, you have tea. I am finding Mr. Coggswell."

And he turned and ran up the hill toward the Zoco Grande.

Almost as soon as Mohammed had left, a tall, slender Arab in western clothes came over to her table. She was in no mood to deal with anyone trying to pick her up, and it was with considerable irritation that she looked up at him.

She saw a handsome face, the eyes hidden by dark glasses with reflective lenses, her own face peering back at her in a double image. He had a high, intelligent forehead, well shaped brows, an almost classically shaped head, and a thin, almost cruel mouth. He stood easily, his weight on one leg, the other slightly in front, bent at the knee. His hands were hooked through his belt, the long fingers hanging loosely down.

"You are Miss Connover, I think," he said extending his hand to her. "I am Marrakeshi, police inspector. May I join you?"

Without waiting for an answer, he pulled out a chair and sat down next to her.

"Are you a friend of Hamilton's?" she asked.

"Yes, I might be called that," he answered oddly.

She wondered what that remark was meant to convey.

"How are you enjoying Tangier, Miss Con-

nover?" he asked, his smile thin and graceful like the rest of him.

"Well, I got lost in the Medina this morning, and that wasn't much fun, but it is a very exciting city," she answered.

"For the first few days, certainly, but I think you will find that it palls a bit and becomes much like any small town," he said, his hands busy with matches for the cigarette he held between his lips.

She watched him as he lit the cigarette, not caring if he was returning her gaze behind the shining, inscrutable surfaces of his sunglasses. His hands were long-fingered and strongly veined and fit well with the rest of his body, narrow and lithe as a cat.

"Oh, I don't know. The culture here is so different, so entirely different from any I have ever known that I doubt I will tire of it quickly," she said.

"Well, I should say that is a fine attitude if you plan to marry Mr. Coggswell and take up residence here," he said, his mouth smiling, large white teeth glinting, one of them surprisingly, gold.

"How did you know I was planning to marry Ham . . . Mr. Coggswell?" she asked, surprised.

She had thought that only the two of them knew of their plans. They had not yet told the children.

"One hears things, Miss Connover," the catlike man assured her, flashing the gold tooth.

"That's most extraordinary. I hadn't thought anyone but the two of us knew," she mused.

He sipped on his mint tea and she knew she was being scrutinized from behind the glasses. She wondered if she should tell him about the scorpion and the poisoned milk. He was, after all, the police inspector and could perhaps offer some advice or assistance.

"Strange things happen in Tangier, Miss Connover, and the intricacies of the information system are just as strange. I would tell you from whom I had this information, but I frankly cannot remember," he said.

"Well, it doesn't really matter, I suppose," she said. "I wonder where that child's got to," she mused.

"Little Mohammed?" he asked.

"Yes. He found me wandering in the Medina, absolutely lost. He scared me a good deal too. I must admit, the way he grabbed me out of a dark doorway. He said he knew where Hamilton was and that if I'd wait here, he'd bring him," she said.

"They'll be along, I expect. This is Africa, Miss Connover, where things take a while to happen. It's no good to be impatient. You must cultivate

an ability to sit back and take things as they come," he said smiling.

"All things?" she asked.

"Just about. Why do you ask?" he said, with a flash of the gold tooth.

"Well, some very peculiar things . . . Ah, here they are," she interrupted herself, spying Hamilton being tugged through the Zoco Chico by Mohammed. Behind them came the huge Arab in the brown jalabad.

"Hamilton, I'm so glad he found you. I've had a perfectly wretched morning," she said as he strode up and nodded briefly to Marrakeshi before sitting down.

"Yes. Mohammed told me you were lost. Didn't I warn you about that? I told you not to go out without Fatima or one of the children," he said sternly.

"Oh, Hamilton, don't scold. I was really frightened," she said.

The big Arab stood out in the street, waiting, it seemed, for them.

"Well, come along, my dear. We'll get you home," he said and took her elbow and propelled her into the street. He nodded to Marrakeshi and they walked up toward the narrow street that led off into the Medina.

"How did you come to be talking with that man?" he asked, a look of concern on his face.

"Well, I don't know really. I was waiting for Mohammed to find you and he just came over and said he was a friend of yours and sat down," she said.

"What did you talk about?" he demanded.

"Well, he did seem to know everything about us. He knows we're planning to be married, although I must say I don't know how," she said.

"Did he ask you any questions?" Hamilton asked, glancing at the big Arab, Mustafa ben Youssef. A significant look passed between them.

"No, but he seemed, in a roundabout way, to be trying to discourage me from staying here. He hinted an intrigue and talked about how strange things could happen here," she said.

"What else?" he asked brusquely.

"Well, I was about to tell him about the scorpion in my room, and something that Jonathan hinted at to me the day we went to the Phoenician graves," she said.

"What did Jonathan say?" he asked, anxiously.

"Well, he seems to think his mother was pushed off that cliff," she said.

"The delusion of a child, I'm afraid," he said. "You did not, I hope, tell him about either."

"No, you came up just then. By the way, Hamil-

ton, Mr. ben Youssef and I have never been formally introduced. And why, may I ask, does it make such a difference whether I told him or not?"

"It doesn't concern you just now," he answered.

"I am abashed that we have never undergone the formalities of an introduction, Miss Connover. I am Mustafa ben Youssef, and I am forever at your service," the big Arab said in a bigger voice.

He shook her hand and she noticed that after he had let it go, he touched his breast. She must ask Fatima if this was an Arab custom.

"How do you do, Mr. ben Youssef. It is nice, finally, to meet you," she said smiling.

She wondered as they walked on up the hill why it mattered so much that she not have said anything to Marrakeshi, and why it was none of her concern just yet.

CHAPTER NINE

"Oh, Lizzie. What a simply magnificent house," Maggie shrieked.

She and Chase had arrived in Tangier that morning, and Elizabeth and Hamilton had gone to meet them at the airport. They had driven into the city in Hamilton's Rolls and walked them up through the Medina to the house in the Casbah. Maggie had chattered like a magpie all the way. Lizzie, look at this. Lizzie, what is that? Oh, that poor baby, Lizzie, how it limps. Lizzie, look at that beautiful silk. What is that little man doing there, Lizzie, about a shoemaker. What is that funny smell, about the kief.

And now they stood in the front hall of Hamilton's house and Elizabeth felt safer than she had in a week, comforted that at last, her friends were there. She no longer felt quite so alien.

"Hey, old man, how about a golf game this afternoon?" Chase asked. "It can't be barbaric

enough that there is no golf course," he added grinning.

"No, the English have seen to it that there is a golf course as well as a club. As a matter of fact I haven't had a chance to play since we got here. We'll take you up and let you change, and then we'll leave the girls to their wedding planning," Hamilton said.

"They're to be in the red room, isn't that right, Hamilton?" Elizabeth asked.

"Right. I'll send Ahmed along with the bags," he said.

She led Chase and Maggie up the stairs and along the hall to a room across the hall from her own. The carpet was a plush maroon and navy Sarkhan, the bed spread a deep red Spanish fabric and the curtains were maroon and white striped heavy satin over organdy. Elizabeth pushed the curtains back and flung open the French doors and the shutters to let in the sunlight.

She made a sign for Chase and Maggie not to ask her any questions yet, and smiled as Hamilton came into the room followed by Ahmed whose big shape almost filled the door. Ahmed was an anomaly, she could not place him quite. He was as big as Mustafa with a huge belly that was as hard as bricks. He wore, instead of a jalaba, dark

red draped pantaloons favored more by the Rifs than the Arabs. A wide cummerbund of yellow wool was wrapped around his waist, its tasselled ends hanging down one side. He wore yellow baboosh, a red fez, and, incongruously, a beautiful, heather colored Harris tweed jacket. He made a very striking appearance as he placed the bags on the benches at the foot of the huge bed and left the room. Elizabeth could see that Maggie was intrigued by him.

"Hamilton, where did you find a sandy haired, blue eyed Arab for a servant, and where did he get that jacket? He looks like a big Scot who strode in off the moors and traded his kilt for those bloomers. I think he's kind of cute," Maggie giggled.

"First off, he's not an Arab. He's a Rif. They are a blond, blue-eyed race of people who have been in Morocco longer than anyone else. They were here when the Phoenicians came. No one knows where they came from, or how long ago. They live in the mountains, pretty much as they have since men remember. They are famous as fierce warriors. As to the jacket, I gave it to him at Christmas. He had admired one of mine, so I sent away to England and had one made for him. He is quite striking, isn't he?" he said, smiling.

"Everything is quite striking," Maggie answered.

"Well, Chase, let's get a move on. We'll have a bite of lunch at the club. You two can fend for yourselves, can't you?" Hamilton asked.

"Of course, dear," Elizabeth answered as the two men started off for the golf course.

"Come on Maggs, let's see the rest of the house," she added.

Maggie ran into the hall and kissed Chase and wished him good luck on the links. She followed Elizabeth into her room, chattering away. As they entered, Solomon and Sheba jumped down off the bad and came to greet them.

"Hello you two, how are you silly cats?" Maggie said and patted them.

She plunked herself down on the bed and said, "What a gorgeous room, Lizzie. I don't think you know how lucky you are to be getting all this."

"Wait until they've left," Elizabeth answered. They listened and heard the front door close behind the two men.

"All right now young lady, what is all this mysterious stuff?" Maggie asked.

Elizabeth sat down on the bed next to her and slowly, and in sequence, told her everything, from the incident in the hold of the Fer de Lance,

through the scorpion, the poisoned milk, Jonathan's theory about his mother's death, the night of the concubine, and finally added, "and the thing that scares me is that Hamilton either makes light of it or tells me it doesn't concern me just now. I'm really very frightened. Some one here is trying to kill me, I think, and for all I know it's Hamilton."

"I simply can't believe that of Hamilton, and I don't think you can either. I think you're being a little hysterical as a matter of fact," Maggie said reprovingly.

"Oh, Maggs, really! What would your reaction be to poison in your milk or a scorpion in your bedroom? Of course I'm a little hysterical," she said.

"Well, if Hamilton were planning to dispatch you with poison or a scorpion bite, do you think he'd have let you invite us here?" she asked.

"Actually, I didn't give him much choice," Elizabeth said, but she thought about this remark. It made some sense, at any rate in a series of events that made no sense at all.

"But I'm not really sure I ought to marry him under these circumstances. I mean things are very peculiar here, and it's not in the least clear who wants me away from here and why."

"Well, the scorpion could have been an accident, but the milk thing is very strange, I'll admit

that. It's hard to put poison in milk by mistake," Maggie admitted finally.

"Chase won't say anything to Hamilton while they're playing golf, will he?" Elizabeth asked, suddenly frightened.

"No. I told him not to mention a thing at least until I'd heard the whole story from you," Maggie assured her.

"I just don't know Maggs. I'm so confused," Elizabeth said.

"Well, we're here, and surely nothing will happen to you as long as we are. I think if things don't come clear in a day or two it would be a good idea for Chase to talk to Hamilton and get things straightened out. Then if you still feel peculiar or if Chase isn't satisfied, you will come back to the States with us," Maggie said.

"I guess that's about all that can be done at the moment," Elizabeth agreed.

"Lizzie, look!"

"Why Natasha, you good girl," Elizabeth exclaimed.

The Russian Blue stood in the doorway, slivery blue, her emerald green eyes gleaming proudly, holding a newborn kitten gently in her mouth. As the two women stood up, she turned and led them into Hamilton's room where, in a wicker basket he had provided for the purpose, she had given

birth to five kittens. She deposited the tiny grey bundle she held in her mouth in the basket and then jumped in and settled down. As the kittens snuggled against her, she looked up for congratulations.

Elizabeth laughed as she and Maggie hunkered down for a closer look, because Solomon had followed them in and was sitting next to the basket, regarding the kittens and Natasha with a solemn and protective eye.

"So, you're going to take over for poor old Nicholas," Elizabeth said.

"Who was Nicholas?" Maggie asked.

"The cat the scorpion killed," she answered shuddering, remembering the sight of the swollen, stiff cat, dead behind her bed.

"Poor thing," Maggie murmured, stroking Natasha gently.

"Well, that will make Hamilton happy. He was quite upset by Nicholas' death," she said as they returned to their room.

"Well, what's on the agenda for tonight?" Maggie asked as they sat down again. "It had better be something pretty special. After all, we've come three thousand miles for whatever it is."

"Hamilton thought we'd eat in. Tangier is not famous for its excellent food, but Hamilton's chef

it. But, after dinner, he thought we could go to the casino. Sounds like fun, I think," she said.

"Terrific. Evening clothes?" Maggie asked.

"Absolutely. What's the fun of going to the casino if one doesn't dress for the occasion?" Elizabeth answered smiling.

"Well, I guess I'd better get Chase's dinner jacket out and see if it needs pressing," Maggie said.

"If it does, pull the bell by the bed, and a little Arab lady named Fatima will appear like magic and do it for you," Elizabeth said.

Ahmed had set a large round Chippendale table in the garden and had lit three torches which were stuck in the ground nearby. The soft light flickered making the silver and crystal and china gleam with a dull richness. Elizabeth thought Hamilton looked even more handsome than on the night she had met him, and wished she felt as uncomplicated about him as she had then. He wore black waistcoat, trousers and tie and a white dinner jacket which heightened his tan. They stood together in the garden, sipping martinis, waiting for Chase and Maggie.

"Here we are, you two," Chase's voice boomed out across the garden.

He leapt down the steps two at a time followed

by Maggie who was screeching for him to wait for her.

She wore a red silk full length gown, sleeveless, with a daringly scooped neckline and pencil slim skirt. Her red silk shoes matched exactly. An opera length string of pearls gleamed white against the dark skin of her bosom. The dark warmth of her tanned skin and black hair contrasted beautifully with the brilliant red of the dress.

Elizabeth had chosen a green satin gown with a deep square neckline and softly pleated skirt. She wore green satin shoes and no jewelry.

"We look like Christmas, you and I," she said laughing.

"And I am Santa Claus, I guess," Hamilton said smiling and scratching the back of his ear contemplatively.

"What do you mean, Hamilton? Are we about to witness an exciting event?" she asked.

"Well, I've been waiting for you two to get here before I did this," he said taking two black velvet jeweler's boxes from his pocket. One was clearly a box containing a ring, the other was long and narrow. He opened the ring box and removed the contents and taking her left hand in his own, he said, "Elizabeth, this can't even begin to tell you how much I love you."

She looked at her hand and could not believe

her eyes. An enormous square cut emerald encircled by large diamonds glittered there.

"Oh, Hamilton, it's beautiful," she breathed, and kissed him on the cheek.

"Well, I'm not through yet. I remembered this next thing when I bought the ring. They seem to go together." He opened the long narrow box. Gleaming inside was an emerald necklace of old fashioned but exquisite design. He removed it from the box and hooked it around her neck so that it's large pendant emerald lay above her breasts.

"Lizzie, I've never seen anything so beautiful," Maggie said.

"The necklace was my mother's, and it has sat in a vault at the bank in New York ever since she died. I thought you might like to have them. Your dress couldn't be more perfect for them, and they are the color of your eyes," he said.

"Oh, Hamilton, thank you, thank you," she cried and threw herself into his arms. He kissed her long and gently and Maggie and Chase burst into applause, laughing.

Ahmed appeared in the doorway and said, "Dinner is served, Mr. Coggswell."

When they had been seated, Ahmed brought in the first course, Sole a la Meuniere.

"You're in for a treat, you two. Antoine is a genius in the kitchen," Elizabeth said.

The sole was flawless, cooked just to the point of flakiness but still moist and flavorful.

"I don't know why you haven't gained twenty pounds, Lizzie. With a chef in the house who can do things like this, I'd eat all the time," Maggie said, sipping her white wine.

"Wait until you taste the Beef Wellington, my dear," she said, smiling mysteriously.

Ahmed brought the beef in on a silver platter, its pastry shell steaming and brown. Maggie oohed and ahead and finally said, "What is that?"

"You'll see. Watch while Ahmed carves it," Hamilton answered smiling.

The filet was revealed with the first slice, deep red in the center as it should be, and a light aroma of pate de foie gras, truffles and the best filet mignon pervaded the air.

The main course was served and Maggie and Chase made noises of delight as they ate and talked with Hamilton about the afternoon's golf game. Elizabeth ate quietly, wondering what was the meaning of the gift of emeralds. Was it an appeasement? Did it signal the end of her troubles?

"Why so quiet, Elizabeth?" Hamilton asked smiling at her.

"I'm a little overcome by my presents, I think," she answered, reaching for her wine.

"Don't drink that!" he said sharply, seizing the glass and flinging its contents into the garden.

"Hamilton, whatever possessed you?" she asked, shocked.

"Ahmed, why doesn't Miss Connover have red wine like the rest of us?" he demanded fiercely of the servant who stood in the doorway.

"You never drink white wine with beef," he said to her by way of explanation for his action.

"Well, there's no need to be angry with the servant. It was just a mistake," she said.

"I suppose so," he said, frowning darkly at Ahmed as he poured her glass full of burgundy.

Elizabeth wondered why Hamilton had thrown the glass of wine away rather than having the servant remove it. Could there have been something in it? She looked over at Maggie who was regarding Hamilton with a shocked expression on her face. Chase continued to eat, occasionally looking up questioningly at Hamilton.

"That was silly of me," he apologized. "I hope I haven't spoiled anyone's dinner," he added smiling around him.

"I thought for a minute there that this was going to turn into a drunken brawl, what with all that wine being hurled around," Maggie said, laughing, and Elizabeth smiled at her attempt to clear the air.

Everyone laughed and the tension dissolved as Ahmed appeared like a djini in the torchlight to clear away the plates. By the time dessert, fresh fruit soaked in cognac and flaming brightly, had been brought in, everyone was relaxed and chatting happily.

"What's this casino like, Hamilton? Is it all plush and gorgeous like Monte Carlo or tacky like Las Vegas?" Maggie asked.

"You're a little snob, Maggie Langtree," Chase said. "I takes my gamblin' any way I can get it, tacky or plush makes no nevermind," he added in a western drawl.

They finished their coffee and cognac and Hamilton suggested they walk the short distance to the back gate of the Casbah where his Rolls Royce was waiting to take them to the casino. Elizabeth noticed that several times during the walk he glanced down and looked anxiously at her and once wrapped a protective arm about her shoulders. She wondered if this were connected with the wine incident, shrugged her shoulders and decided to forget this whole thing and enjoy the glamorous evening. She would think about it later.

The limousine pulled up in front of a large white stucco villa in the French section. The streets were lined with large topiary trees, their

shapes darks shadows in the night. A red carpet led from the curb up the steps and into the brightly lit interior of the casino. Elizabeth could see people walking dressed in beautiful clothes and glittering with jewels.

As they entered the casino, Elizabeth felt herself surrounded by an almost palpable hush which she supposed to be the noise made by people winning and losing large sums of money at games of chance.

"Well, Chase, what's your game?" Hamilton asked.

"Baccarat, I suppose," Chase answered, smiling like a delighted child.

As they walked toward the baccarat tables, Elizabeth took in the red and gold and the green felt of the gaming tables. The walls were white except for large panels of red brocade. The woodwork was gilded and richly carved with cherubim and dolphins and fruit. Three large crystal chandeliers illuminated the room, and each table had a green shaded lamp hanging directly over it at forehead level.

She and Maggie looked on as Hamilton won a considerable amount of money at baccarat.

"Well, that about evens us up after the trouncing you gave me on the golf course," he smiled.

"He beat you, sweetie. Hamilton beat the big gambler from the west," Maggie said laughing.

"Nobody beats anybody else at baccarat, my dear. The house wins or loses. Hamilton beat the house, and I didn't," he said, smiling indulgently down at her.

"Would either of you young ladies like to try your hand at something?" Hamilton asked.

"I'd like to try roulette, if I could," Elizabeth said.

Hamilton walked with her to the roulette table and told the croupier to give her 20 five dollar chips. The croupier shoved the pile of yellow chips across the green table and Elizabeth piled them in front of her.

"What do I do now?" she whispered over her shoulder to Hamilton.

"You might as well play neighbors," he said, "What number do you want to play?"

"Four, I think," she said.

He placed a chip on number four and chips at each of the corners of the square. He explained that this method increased her chances of winning, and that if her number came up, her bet would be multiplied 64 times.

"Faites vos jeux, Mesdames et Messieurs, faites vos jeux," the croupier sang out.

A dark hand pushed five black chips toward the croupier and a voice she recognized said, "Avec Madame."

She looked up into the black eyes of Richard Cogswell, nodded, and forced a smile. She wondered what Hassan was doing there.

"Les jeux sont fait, Mesdames et Messieurs, les jeux sont fait," the croupier chanted as he tossed a little white ball into the spinning wheel. Elizabeth held her breath as the ball plunked into a slot and the wheel stopped spinning.

"Le numero quatre," the croupier announced, and he scooped all the other chips from the table and pushed large piles of yellow and black chips toward Hassan and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth changed her chips to number 16, again playing neighbors. Hassan once more placed his chips atop hers. This spin of the wheel brought not a direct win, but number 12, one of the neighbors of number 16, came up, and again Elizabeth and Hassan received piles of chips, though not so large as before.

"Eight I think, this time," she said to Hamilton, and laid out her chips accordingly.

Again Hassan pushed his chips at the croupier and said, "Avec Madame."

By this time a large crowd had gathered around

the roulette table and Maggie was squealing with delight and kidding Chase about being outdone by the little gambler from the East.

The wheel spun, the ball clicked into a slot. Elizabeth could feel Hassan's eyes on her, and as the croupier read the wheel, she returned his glare.

"Le numero huit, mesdames et messieurs," he sang out.

On a hunch, a queer feeling that she could not explain, Elizabeth removed all her chips, by now an enormous pile, from the board. Hassan looked angrily at her, shook his head and placed his entire night's winnings on red. She watched with interest as the wheel spun, the ball clicked, and the croupier said, with great relief in his voice, "Le zero." The house had won. Hassan had lost and her hunch had been correct.

"I expect it's only beginner's luck, but you should have stuck with me," she said quietly across the table. The lower half of his face was illumined by the light hanging above the table. He frowned deeply, his eyes flashed at her briefly, and he turned and disappeared into the crowd.

"Do you want to play some more, Elizabeth, or do you want to cash in?" Hamilton asked.

"I'm not going to push my luck. I'll cash in, I think," she answered.

"I won $100 at the Wheel of Fortune. Chase says nobody but tourists and fall guys play the Wheel of Fortune, that the odds for the house are too heavy. I guess I showed him," Maggie giggled proudly.

"It's been a hard night for the gambler from the west," Chase said, grinning sheepishly.

Elizabeth felt elated at having won so much money, but she felt very queer about Hassan.

"Will he blame me for losing all that money?" she asked Hamilton.

"How can he? He wouldn't have lost if he'd stuck with you. Good gamblers, if there is such a thing, stick with a winner's hunch," Hamilton answered.

"Who was that man who was playing with you?" Maggie asked.

"He's Hamilton's half brother," she whispered. "He seems to resent me anyway, and I'm a little worried about how he'll take this."

"Where shall we go for a nightcap?" Chase asked.

"A new nightclub has opened in the Casbah, quite near the house. The view from there is breathtaking at night and I rather thought we could stop in there," Hamilton answered.

Elizabeth was glad to put off returning to the

house. She wondered what surprise it would hold for her tonight. Maybe with Maggie and Chase there, the night would pass without incident. Somehow the look on Hassan's face as he had stalked from the roulette table made her doubt that. But, surely, even he would not make a scene while there were guests in the house.

CHAPTER TEN

"I've never seen the Fer de Lance, you know. Could we go down to see her this morning?" Maggie asked.

"Well, if you want to go shopping, we'd better do that first. The shops all close for siesta at noon and most of them won't open again until four. But, if you like, we can shop our way down in that direction and go see the ship when we've finished," Elizabeth answered as she gave her hair a final few strokes of the brush.

"That's fine with me," Maggie answered, surveying herself in the full-length mirror.

"You look fine, Maggs," Elizabeth said, smiling at her in the mirror.

Maggie wore a red and blue striped man tailored organdy shirt with a button-down collar and long sleeves. Her blue denim skirt was belted with a red and blue grosgrain belt and navy blue sandals completed her costume. Elizabeth thought the

colors suited her warm, dark complexion very well.

Elizabeth had chosen for this shopping spree an orange sail cloth culotte with a bright yellow and orange striped sleeveless sweater. She had tied a yellow scarf about her hair to keep it from blowing in her eyes. She had decided on a pair of yellow sneakers because they were the most comfortable walking shoes she had.

"Have you got comfortable shoes on? If those are new sandals you're going to find yourself suffering from blisters by tonight," she admonished.

"They're a year old and well broken in. Don't worry about me. You about ready?" Maggie asked.

"I sure am. Let's get started," Elizabeth answered, springing up from her dressing table.

The two women walked out to the French doors to the terrace and down the steps into the garden. Elizabeth laughed at the sight of Solomon and Sheba trying to catch a Monarch butterfly. The two cats leaped high into the air after it, but each time the graceful orange and black creature swooped and dipped and evaded them. They walked through the gate, and closing it after them, set off toward the Place de Casbah.

"Since the day I got lost, I've learned how to get down to the Zoco Chico and back. We'll be okay

as long as we stick to shops along that route. I want to dash up to an antique shop in the French section for a moment, but from there it's only five minutes to the ship," Elizabeth said.

"Look at the sheep," Maggie said, pointing excitedly at two sheep munching sleepily at a bale of hay in front of the large house across from the jail.

"You often see that here, Hamilton says. Near the time of Ramadan, a Moslem religious celebration, every roof has a sheep on it. They fatten the sheep up and then slaughter them. All I know about Ramadan is that it is observed by absolute fasting from dawn until sundown, no water is taken even, and at dusk incredible feasting begins and lasts all night. Ramadan lasts for thirty days," Elizabeth said, pleased to be able to show her knowledge of this strange city.

"Poor things, don't know what's in store for them," Maggie said, patting a sheep on the head as they passed it.

They started down a short flight of steps leading to the gate in the Casbah wall. Suddenly Maggie stopped and pointed at a roof top below them on the steps.

"Look, Lizzie, they look like a pride of lions," she said.

Elizabeth saw that a large family of tawny

orange cats was lounging in the sun atop the roof at which Maggie was pointing. As they approached, Elizabeth recognized the building as a small tea house. A moon vine grew on a small terrace at its front and its branches extended up and over the roof. The cats lounged in the shade of the vine while their kittens froliced over and around them.

They are cute, aren't they," Elizabeth said smiling at the antics of the kittens. She counted ten kittens and three full grown cats. "Quite a pride," she murmured.

Maggie's voice, an excited whisper, interrupted her idle interest in the cats. "Lizzie, have a look at this!"

Elizabeth turned and saw that Maggie was peering into the interior of the cafe, motioning her to come and look.

"Those two! Sneaking off to a tea house like a pair of Arabs," she said and was about to rush into the cafe when she realised with a shock that Hamilton was not with Chase. He and the police inspector sat, heads together, talking very seriously on the terrace of the cafe.

"Who's that man? Where do you suppose Chase is?" Maggie whispered in her ear.

"Let's get away from here, Maggie," she whis-

pered back, and walked quickly past the open door of the cafe, Maggie at her heels.

"Who was that sinister looking man?" Maggie asked as they rushed through the Casbah gate and down the narrow Street of the Gazelles.

"We can slow down now, Maggs. He's the police inspector I met in the Zoco Chico the day I got lost. I told you about him, remember?" she said.

"Why would Hamilton be talking to him?" Maggie asked, her eyes wide.

"I can't imagine. He seemed very anxious to get me away from him that day in the Zoco Chico. He questioned me quite closely about what we had been talking about and seemed particularly disturbed that I almost told the inspector about the scorpion thing," Elizabeth answered.

"How peculiar. I wonder . . ."

"Wait a minute, Maggie. There is bound to be some logical explanation for this. We're not going to let it ruin our day, okay?" she said, hoping she sounded more convincing than she felt.

"Well, okay, but it does make me wonder," Maggie said.

"No buts and no wondering. Come on, we've got shopping to do," Elizabeth interrupted firmly. She took Maggie's arm in a firm grip and propelled her down the street.

Elizabeth's main objective on this shopping excursion was the purchase of a present for Hamilton. She knew she would find nothing suitable in the Medina, but planned to let Maggie rummage through the small dark shops to her heart's content before walking to the French section with its legitimate antique shops.

"Hey," Maggie said, stopping abruptly. "Look at that bracelet."

It was a silver harem bracelet, heavy and intricately molded and engraved. They entered the curio shop and a tiny, brown Arab in a white jalaba scurried toward them bowing, his little feet encased in the smallest yellow babousb Elizabeth had ever seen.

"Watch it, Maggs. He thinks he's got his hands on a couple of tourists and he'll try to take you for everything you've got," Elizabeth said.

While Maggie prattled away at the shopkeeper, Elizabeth let her eyes roam over the shop. Oriental rugs, or more accurately, Arab imitation oriental rugs of exquisitely bad workmanship, hung about the walls. Eight or nine leaded glass lanterns hung from the ceiling, genuine antiques, made the week before in a workroom in the Medina, she was certain. The inevitable "antique" wooden and silver pistols were displayed atop small tables along

with ceramic bowls of blue and yellow. Curved daggers with intricately engraved silver scabbards hung about looking dangerous and lethal. She took one from its hook and removed its sheath. She was surprised by the sharpness of its blade.

"The Arab men carry these for the eating of the fruit, madame," the tiny shopkeeper assured her.

She smiled at him and nodded her thanks and watched while Maggie haggled with him over the bracelet. His tiny black eyes, sleekly combed grey hair topped by a red fez, and his sharp nose combined to make him look like nothing so much as a sleek white rat.

She replaced the dagger in its sheath and as she hung it back on the wall, she remembered having seen similar knives slung over shoulders by long tassled silk cords. She had wondered why city dwellers had carried knives in the streets, it had seemed anachronistic. "For the eating of fruit, madame," she murmured to herself and smiled.

The slimness and graceful curve of the dagger reminded her of Marrakeshi suddenly and she wondered why Hamilton had been talking with him. The scene had seemed furtive somehow, and she was much more disturbed by it than she cared to tell Maggie. What possible business could they have together?

"I got it for two dollars," Maggie whispered excitedly, shaking Elizabeth from her reverie. "Was that too much?"

"Well, that depends. What was the price he asked at first?" Elizabeth answered, smiling at her friend.

"Fort dirhem. My wonderful mathematical mind went to work on that and it only took me a few minutes to figure out that that was eight dollars, and that eight dollars was too much money." Maggie answered, grinning devilishly.

"I'd say that getting him down to less than half his original price was fairly spectacular," Elizabeth said, smiling.

She turned and nodded to the little Arab and she and Maggie walked out into the street. The sunlight was almost blinding after the dusty gloom of the shop, and Maggie squinted as she turned and waved to the shopkeeper who stood in the doorway, hand to his breast, smiling and bowing.

They continued down the narrow street toward the heart of the Medina and Elizabeth followed her friend into one shop after another as the dark haired girl found more and more things she simply could not live without. By the time they had arrived in the French section an hour later, Maggie had haggled for and bought leather book covers

for her children's school books, ("I know this is a little extreme, but they're so beautiful," she had apologized for her extravagance.), several yards of lovely lavender hand woven wool that she intended to have a winter suit and coat made of, three brass bowls similar to those used by the water sellers ("won't these make divine ash trays?"), and a green leather jewel box for her [illegible].

As they approached the casino, Elizabeth said, "I hope it's still there."

"What's still here? Why are we going to the casino in the middle of the afternoon?" Maggie asked.

"Silly, we're not going to the casino. But the other night I saw something in the window of this shop, and I think it'd be a perfect gift for Hamilton," she said, stopping in front of a shop next to the casino.

"Well, is it still here?" Maggie asked, her eyes searching the window.

"Yes, it is. Come on, it's getting close to noon, and I don't want him to close up on us," she said. Maggie followed her into the shop.

If the tiny Chinese jade carving was authentic, and she thought it was, it would be a perfect gift for Hamilton. She stood inside the shop looking

at the statue while Maggie, her arms full of packages, roamed around, murmuring exclamations of surprise and delight.

"May I be of service, Madame?" a voice with a heavy French accent murmured at her back.

"Why yes, thank you. How much are you asking for that small statue there?" she asked, pointing to the figure.

"Oh, that, Madame, why that is nothing. Allow me to show you some of the fine and truly authentic things we have," the man said, a look of derision for the jade twisting his mouth into an ugly grin.

"Well, I really want to know how much you are asking for the statue," she insisted.

"Well, if Madame is sure she will settle for something so inferior. I am asking five hundred dirhem," the man said, his opinion of her taste clear in his tone of voice.

"Sold," Elizabeth said, suddenly aware that the dealer did not know the true value of the statue. She wanted to close the deal before he became suspicious. One hundred dollars for a Chinese jade that was at least 1,500 years old was an unbelievable price.

The dealer picked the statue up from the window and carried it to the counter where he wrapped it carelessly in newspaper and shoved it

across the counter at her. She handed him the five hundred dirhem, picked up the statue and calling to Maggie, left the store hurriedly, half afraid the man would realise his error and come running after her.

"How much did it cost?" Maggie asked as they walked down the shady, wide boulevard, the topiary acting as an umbrella over their heads.

"Only a hundred dollars. That fool didn't know what he had. At least I don't think he did. I'd like to stop in at an art dealer to see if I can get its authenticity verified," she answered.

They passed a small gallery on their way down the hill toward the Avenida de Spagna. The name Henri Leclerc was stencilled on the door in gold leaf. Maggie followed as Elizabeth pushed the door open and went in.

A man who looked as if were straight from a 1906 daguerrotype stood behind the counter. He wore a stiff detachable collar and celluloid cuffs with gold links in them. His hair was parted in the middle and combed flat to his head. He wore a thick four in hand tie and a waistcoat.

"Mr. Leclerc?" Elizabeth asked. She did not want to deal with any hired hands. She wanted the opinion of the dealer himself. To her delight, he bowed from the waist, clicking his heels as he did so, and said, "At your service, Madame."

She unwrapped the jade figure and set it wordlessly on the counter before him. He gazed at it for a moment, a look of rapture stealing into his face. He picked it up, turned it around in his hands, and murmured to her, "Old jade has a warmth. It is almost as if it were alive."

He replaced it on the counter, looked at it again and said "I will pay you $1,500 for this piece. It is worth much more, but that is all I can pay."

"It is not for sale, Mr. Leclerc, but you have told me what I wanted to know. It is authentic then?"

"Absolutely. If ever you should decide to sell it, please be so kind as to notify me before selling to anyone else," he said.

As she wrapped the figurine up again, he looked longingly at it, sighed deeply and said, "You are very lucky to have such a beautiful thing."

"Thank you, sir," she said and gathering Maggie up, she left the store.

They walked down the Rue Mohammed V past the American Library toward the Avenida de Spagna. Ten minutes later they were standing on the pier looking up at the Fer de Lance gleaming in the sun.

"What a beautiful ship she is. No wonder you got engaged on it," Maggie said with characteris-

tic lack of logic. "What is that word for a beautiful sailing ship?"

"Yare, I think," Elizabeth answered.

"Yes, that's it. She's yare, even though she's not a sailing ship," Maggie said.

"Yes, she certainly is. And two of the nicest weeks I can ever remember were spent aboard her. Things only began to fall apart once we got to Tangier," she said, the last a remark to herself.

"Well, let's go aboard. I can't wait to see the inside," Maggie said starting up the gangplank, apparently unaware of the last remark.

They clambered up the gangplank, deposited their bundles on the deck and started off toward the entrance to the cabins in the stern of the ship. The teak decks had been recently polished and gleamed darkly in the sun. The brass fittings on the deck and around the doors and portholes shone mightly from many polishings.

Elizabeth lead the way down the stairs and along the carpeted corridor. The heavily carved walnut doors to the cabins were all closed.

"My cabin is right down this way," Liz said as she turned a corner. She turned the huge brass knob and pushed the heavy door open. She stepped into the cabin, warning Maggie of the bulkhead and switched on the cabin's indirect lighting.

"Oh Lizzie, it's like something out of a dream," Maggie breathed, her eyes as big as silver dollars. She moved quietly around the big cabin, touching things here and there as if to assure herself that the ship really existed.

"What a lovely big bed," she exclaimed laughing and plunked herself down full length on it, bouncing like a child. She sat up and took off her sandals and squiggled her toes deep into the pile of the oriental rug.

"I can't get over it. This is like something out of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," she giggled.

"Wait til you see the bathroom, or rather the head as we old salts call it," she said leading the way.

"Lavender! Sunken tub! Do you suppose those taps and the faucet are real gold?" she asked. "I mean I knew Hamilton was wealthy, but I had no idea it reached this level."

"I didn't either until I saw this ship," Elizabeth agreed, laughing. You should see the bridge. There are enough instruments up there to run a battleship. There's sonar and radar and an automatic pilot and I don't know what all."

"Could I see Hamilton's cabin?" Maggie asked.

"Sure come on. It's just across the corridor."

They opened the door to Hamilton's cabin, and Maggie squealed her delight.

"Mutiny on the Bounty. Or something like that. Charles Laughton lived in a cabin just like this," Maggie squealed.

It was a beautiful cabin, Elizabeth thought, and it suited Hamilton to a tee. It was entirely panelled in walnut, and instead of portholes had a large bay window like the captain's cabin on a galleon. Book cases lined one wall and a lovely walnut desk carved on four sides stood in front of them. Next to it was an antique globe at least three feet in diameter and a lovely Victorian dictionary stand. A leather desk chair stood empty behind the desk.

The floor was carpeted with dark Oriental rugs, and in front of the window, the panes of which were leaded, stood a leather couch and two arm chairs ranged around a low mahogany table. Hamilton's bed, although outsized for what it was, was the traditional ship's bed built, as it were, into the wall. It was neatly made up and covered with a maroon spread of heavy Spanish fabric. They closed the door behind them as they left the cabin.

Maggie oohed and aahed and squealed her way through the saloon and the lounge and the rest of the ship's cabins, expressing the hope that Elizabeth would invite her and Chase to take a sea voyage with them some day.

Elizabeth assured her that they would as she

led her along the corridor and down the steps into the ship's bowels.

"Is this where you met that funny little sailor?" Maggie whispered.

"Yes, but why are we whispering?" Elizabeth asked.

"Because there might be other funny little sailors down here now," Maggie whispered back and giggled.

"Shh. There is somebody down here," Elizabeth whispered, stopping for a moment. "Maybe we'd better go back."

"Silly, are you scared? You're the mistress of this ship, after all," Maggie whispered, smiling at her like an accomplice.

Elizabeth crept along the corridor, her sneakers making no sound on the metal floor, toward the open door of the hold ahead. She peered around the door jamb and after several seconds withdrew her head quickly.

"Ahmed's in there. His back is to us, look," she whispered against Maggie's ear so she would not be overheard.

Maggie peeked and pulled her head back and whispered, "He's doing something very queer. Look again."

Elizabeth looked into the brightly lit hold.

Ahmed was standing at a long table holding what looked like a child's doll, a souvenir doll dressed in Arab clothes, upside down and pouring a white powdery substance into the bottom of it. When it was filled he plugged the hole up and placed the doll in a carton marked TOYS.

As he repeated the act with another doll he had picked up from a pile on the table, Elizabeth noticed that stacked along the wall to the left of his table were at least 60 cartons marked TOYS. Ahmed suddenly stopped what he was doing, as if warned of their presence by some sixth sense, and unable to move, Elizabeth watched in horror as he slowly placed the doll on the table and turned around.

"Run Maggs!" Elizabeth screamed and they turned and ran full tilt back along the corridor toward the steps up to the cabin deck.

She could hear the huge Rif's heavy footsteps behind her and finally yelled, "I have a gun, Miss Connover. Please tell your friend to stop running."

Both women came to an abrupt halt and Elizabeth swung around and faced the Rif whose blue eyes burned out at her from under his heavy grey eyebrows.

"What is the matter with you Ahmed? What do you think you're doing?" she demanded.

"Come along Miss Connover," he said, pointing the gun at them. He directed them up the stairs and down the corridor.

Outside the door to Elizabeth's cabin he stopped and said, "I believe this is your cabin, Miss Connover. Inside please, both of you."

Elizabeth stood stock still, terrified, but unable to comprehend what was happening.

"Please Miss Connover. Don't cause me to employ force," he said.

"For God's sake, Lizzie, don't cause him to employ force," Maggie said, giggling hysterically as she slipped past Elizabeth and into the cabin.

"Ahmed, think carefully. When Mr. Coggswell finds out about this it will cause him great pain and you will lose your job. You know how fond he is of you. How can you betray him like this?" Elizabeth demanded, wondering exactly how he was betraying Hamilton.

"I am sorry to have to do this," he answered, an undisguised look of pain flashing across his big face, "but it is the boss who ordered me. Inside please."

Elizabeth dumbly went into the cabin and turned to watch incredulously as Ahmed removed the key from the inside of the door, looked up and said, "The windows are hermetically sealed. The air conditioning, you know. He stepped out of the

cabin, closed the door and the two women heard the lock click as he turned the key outside.

"Did you hear what he said?" Maggie asked, an hysterical note in her voice. She had succumbed to that phenomenon called fou rire, crazy laughter. It often happened to people in situations of stress, Elizabeth knew.

"It is the boss who ordered it. Hamilton." Elizabeth said and sank dumbly onto the bed and burst into tears.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Elizabeth's tears seemed to enable Maggie to control her own hysterical laughter.

"Lizzie! Get hold of yourself! Crying is not going to do us any good now. We've got to get ourselves out of here. You can cry over your lost love later." Elizabeth heard Maggie's stern words vaguely through the storm of questions and tears that raged in her head.

She straightened her shoulders, and wiping the tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand, she sat up and said, "I'm sorry, Maggie. I just can't believe that Hamilton could do this. In spite of my suspicions, I just can't believe it."

"What do you suppose was going on down there that we weren't supposed to see," Maggie asked.

"Hamilton all but told me. He said Hassan runs a small import-export business to ameliorate the funds Hamilton gives him. He uses this ship," Elizabeth said.

"How does that explain what we're doing here?" Maggie asked.

"You saw what Ahmed was doing. He was pouring a white substance into the bottom of souvenir dolls, plugging up the hole and putting them into cartons. It's clear that this import-export business is in fact a smuggling operation of some kind, drugs probably, and that Hamilton not only knows all about it, but runs it," she said her voice a monotone.

"But why should Hamilton have to be involved in anything so petty as dope smuggling? Really, Elizabeth, it all sounds like a Grade B Mafia movie. I feel as if I'm in a Grade B Mafia movie, as a matter of fact," Maggie said, the laughter threatening to well up again.

"Okay, Maggs, you were right a moment ago. I don't know the answers to any of these questions, but they're not as important right now as getting out of here. Come on, let's see what we can do," she said firmly, hoping to avert Maggie's fit of laughter.

She walked over and turned the door knob, knowing what the result would be before she did it. Maggie was at the porthole when she turned around.

"He's right you know. It is sealed. And even if

we could get it open, I'm not sure either of us could fit through," Maggie said.

They sat down again on the bed and looked hopelessly at each other, each trying to think of a way out of the cabin.

"We could use that lamp base as a hammer to break the window with," Maggie said.

She got up and unplugged the lamp and removed its shade and the light bulb.

"It's quite heavy, really," Maggie said, hopefully.

"Well, give it a try," Elizabeth urged.

Maggie walked to the porthole and banged on it several times taking deep back swings before she struck the glass. Each time the lamp bounced off the glass as if it had been rubber. She turned and looked questioningly at Elizabeth.

"I forgot. Hamilton told me that all the portholes, and the big window in his cabin too, have unbreakable glass, specially mounted to prevent them giving way under the pressure of water in heavy seas," Elizabeth said, discouraged.

"Well, maybe if we keep pounding and shouting, somebody down on the pier would hear us," Maggie said, refusing to admit defeat.

Maggie pounded at the inflexible glass and they both shouted for help. Ahmed's face appeared at the porthole, and then he passed out of view. A

moment later the door opened a fraction and his voice said, "I assure you ladies that the cabins are soundproofed. From outside, you look very much like two goldfish in a bowl." He closed the door with a snap and retreated down the corridor.

Elizabeth sank into a chair and Maggie placed the lamp on the floor and then sank down beside it.

"Maggs. What are we going to do?"

"Well, I've been thinking. Unless he's locked up too, somewhere, Chase is going to miss me as soon as it gets dark. Somebody'll find us. Don't you worry," she said.

Elizabeth smiled at Maggie's show of bravery and said, "I guess that's our only hope. I just hope Chase gets to us before they do whatever it is they're planning to do with us."

"I just had an idea. We could turn on all the water in the bathroom and let everything overflow, and and then when they came to see what was going on, we could bash one of them on the head with the lamp and get away," Maggie said.

"They'd probably just decide to let us drown in here," Elizabeth said. "In any event, they'd certainly figure out that we were trying to get them to open the door."

"I guess you're right," Maggie said, subsiding back in a red and blue heap on the floor.

"You know, I thought it was queer that Hamilton refused to take the scorpion thing seriously. And then when I overheard him on the phone, and again when my milk was poisoned, I got really scared, but I never dreamed it involved something like this," Elizabeth said, thoughtfully.

"I still can't believe that he's really involved," Maggie said thoughtfully.

"Well, in our present position, it makes really very little difference who's involved, doesn't it?" Elizabeth asked.

They were sitting close together on the bed several hours later, shortly after sunset when the cabin door swung slowly open. They flung their arms around each other and stared at the moving door in terror. Elizabeth realised, with a start, that there was no one in the hall outside.

"Come on, Maggs," she whispered and ran to the door.

She looked out into the corridor in time to see the tall, slender figure of an Arab woman disappearing around the corner.

"My God. How queer. He'd kill her if he knew," she muttered.

"What is it, Elizabeth?" Maggie whispered from the bed.

"Come on, Maggs. It's our chance," she said and stepped out into the corridor and began running

in the same direction the Arab woman had gone.

She heard a great crash behind her and turned to see Maggie sprawled in the corridor, apparently having tripped over the bulkhead.

"Go on, Lizzie, run!" Maggie yelled. "They can't hurt me while you're free. Get Chase, hurry!"

Elizabeth felt a moment of panic at the thought of leaving her friend behind, but the sight of Ahmed looming in the hall behind Maggie decided her and she started running. As she ran up the stairs to the deck she heard a resounding thud and smiled at the knowledge that Maggie had tripped the big Rif in an attempt to give her more time.

"Good girl," she muttered as she ran down the deck to the gangplank, clambered down its metal steps and sprinted up the pier.

The night lights burned with a blue glow along the pier, casting a weird and ghastly light on the piles of crates stacked alongside the Fer de Lance. It cast huge, monstrous shadows without really illumining the pier. As she ran she looked around for signs of a night watchman or a policeman, but none was in sight.

She looked ahead at the Medina sprawling its way up the hill toward the Casbah and realised that every light in the city was out. The lights on the pier must have gotten their power from a

separate generator, probably the one used by ships in port.

She ducked into a space between two high stacks of cargo and stood panting, trying to figure out what to do next. She looked back over her shoulder and could see no sign of Ahmed.

"Well, no sense in just standing about. Almost anywhere else is a better place to be than here," she thought, and she darted out from her hiding place and began to run lightly and soundlessly toward the Avenida. She was glad of her sneakers which caught a firm and silent purchase on the surface of the pier with each step.

She ran up the hill, through the gate in the Medina wall, turned left sharply and ran into the Zoco Chico. She stopped in front of the Cafe Central, amazed. The entire square, usually bustling with the life of the Medina, was utterly deserted. There was no one to whom she could appeal for help. The small square was illumined only by moonlight, and the black windows of the hotels seemed to look down on her derisively.

She ran through and out into the Medina, not certain where she was going, only sure that she must keep running or she would be caught by Ahmed. He must be running through the streets now, listening for her footsteps, she realised. As she ran, she became aware of a peculiar sound, a

man's voice, high in the Casbah, singing a mournful and lonely song. The streets were completely empty, the shops closed up tight, the corrugated iron doors clanged down solidly for the night, the moon silently lighting the street through which she ran.

Fear gripped her stomach in a fist of iron, her heart pounded loudly and painfully in her chest, and somewhere in the Casbah, a man was singing, perhaps to keep himself company in the dark.

As she ran, it became clear to her that the darkened city was not to her advantage as she had first thought. Ahmed knew the city better, and the darkness had driven everyone to whom she could appeal for help from the streets. Certainly she could not go back to the house. Hamilton would be there and she would be worse off than she had been on the boat.

She spotted a narrow alley ahead about twenty paces, and ducked into it to catch her breath and think. She stood panting in the little alley, a nightmare feeling of being powerless to run from a pursuer growing in her. In the dark, the Medina seemed more exotic and foreign than usual. Buildings seemed to lose their solidness and form, to become hazy and vaguely menacing. She realised suddenly that this was no trick of the dark or of her mind. A fog had silently crept up into the

Medina from the sea and her surroundings were becoming obscured even as she watched.

She glanced overhead and saw that the sky was still bright with stars, and the full moon hung fatly glowing in the purple sky. The fog hung thickly in a ring, low along the Medina and around and up the hill. As she looked at the fog and cursed it, a dog began to howl, as if accompanying the singing man in a dirge. The nightmare aspects of the dark grew and she felt rooted to the spot.

Her ears picked up the sound of furtive footsteps, how far off she could not tell. Gasping in terror she leaped out of her alley and began to run again, hoping that the emptiness of the city had carried the sounds of Ahmed running from a long distance.

She had never felt so entirely alone, even when Sylvia had finally died and left her by herself. She was in a strange city, running for her life through the night, and she could think of no one to turn to. Go to the American Embassy. That was advice given to all travellers should they find themselves in trouble. The thought was so ludicrous that she had to put her hand over her mouth to stifle the laughter that threatened to well up. The American Embassy was all the way across town. She was not sure she could find it in broad day-

light, much less in the middle of the night in a fog with someone intent on doing her harm hard on her heels.

She was so exhausted by running that her breath came in loud, jagged gasps. Only utter terror kept her from sinking exhausted to the street. As she ran on she searched wildly for somewhere to hide, for someone to turn to, hoping for the appearance of a djini who would sweep her away from this incredible nightmare. She heard Ahmed's footsteps, closer behind her now, and underneath the pattern of her own silent footsteps and those of her pursuer, she thought she could hear a third set. Foolish thought. Fear must be driving me mad.

She burst suddenly into the Zoco Chico and almost screamed with vexation and hopelessness. She had merely been running in a circle. She ran full tilt out the other side, and, in a panic of fear, Ahmed's footsteps loud in her ears, she began pounding on the first door she came to. The candle flickering in the shuttered window went out suddenly. Someone must be home, someone must answer. She beat her fists frantically against the door sobbing loudly.

"No one will answer, Miss Connover. Arabs are afraid of the dark."

Ahmed's voice was close against her ear, and

as she spun around to face him. he placed his hand over her mouth strangling the scream before it could escape her lips.

He stood close to her, one arm around her shoulder, the other firmly over her mouth.

"There is no use screaming, Miss Connover. If you do, people will only think you are my wife who is being punished for misbehavior," the big Rif muttered into her ear. "I will let you go, if you will promise to be silent. Nod your head if you agree."

Elizabeth nodded her head vigorously, all but smothering under the man's huge paw.

"We will walk to the place where the boss waits," he said, and taking her arm, he propelled her up the dark street in the direction of the Casbah.

So he is taking me to Hamilton, she thought. I might as well have run there myself.

They wound silently up through the Medina and across the Casbah. They met no other living soul on the way, and Elizabeth wondered whether she would have had the strength to cry out for help had they chanced upon someone.

She did not realise until they had arrived that Ahmed was not taking her to the house in the Casbah. He had instead, propelled her through the back gate of the Casbah and down a dirt road.

Only when he pushed her in front of him through the break in the cobbled wall did she realise that they were heading for the white villa above the Atlantic near the Phoenician graves.

It rose white in the moonlight before her, its windows dark, seemingly deserted. Only the donkey, lying asleep at the end of his tether, testified to the existence of anything living there.

She stumbled several times as they crossed the field, but Ahmed's hand on her arm saved her from falling. So, Hamilton owned this house too. He must use it as headquarters for the drug traffic or whatever it was. As they approached the front door, a ghastly knowledge slowly formed in her mind. If Hamilton owned this house, and if Jonathan's suspicion's about his mother's death were right, it seemed clear to her that Hamilton had killed her. He was probably sitting inside now, devising a plan to make her own death look like an accident.

She hung back and Ahmed yanked her along as he opened the front door. He pushed her through, closed it behind him and conducted her down a long tiled corridor toward a large heavy door at the end. He knocked twice and opened the door, shoved her in and said, "Here she is," before closing the door behind her.

She found herself in a large dark room, light

only by two candles, the shutters on the French doors closed tightly. The candles made shadows dance and hover on the walls and ceiling like ghosts at a party. Seated behind a desk, the candle in front of him throwing deep shadows into the hollows of his cheeks and eyes was Hassan. He smiled at her, and the candle's trick made him look like a ghoul, his hideous smile forming around a dark cavern at the bottom of his face.

She turned from him and slowly surveyed the room. She was appalled to see, seated languidly, catlike on a couch, Marrakeshi, smiling, gold teeth glittering in the candle light.

"So, we meet again, Miss Connover," he said quietly.

"I might have known you'd be involved," she spit at him.

"I'm sorry it could not be under more pleasant circumstances," he said, smiling and ignoring her remark.

"What will happen to Maggie?" she demanded of Hassan.

"She will have to be killed. That is absolutely necessary," he said quietly, smiling, clearly enjoying her horror at his words. "Although it seems to me that you should be more concerned about what is going to happen to you." His ghoul's smile crept over his face.

"Where is Hamilton? Hiding from me? You might as well get the boss in here," she said.

Both Hassan and Marrakeshi broke into uproarious laughter and she stood staring at them dumbfounded. Marrakeshi arose from the couch in a long fluid motion and walked over to stand behind Hassan at the desk.

"You are a very lovely woman, Elizabeth. It is a shame that you know so much," Hassan said finally, having controlled his laughter.

"Then Hamilton is here. Where? I want to see him," she demanded.

"Silly girl. It is too bad. Up to now I've only been trying to frighten you. If only you had scared off more easily, this would not be necessary," Hassan said.

"Hamilton is involved, isn't he?" she whispered.

"But now I shall have to kill you," he said, ignoring her questions. "No. Hamilton is in no way involved. He lacks the necessary imagination," he said finally.

"If Hamilton had kept you in the house, as Arabs keep any decent woman, this unpleasantness would never have been necessary," Marrakeshi said, shaking his head in mock sorrow.

He looked out at her over Hassan's shoulder, and without the reflective sunglasses, she saw that

his eyes, although large and dark, gleamed with corruption. As she watched, his nostrils flared as though smelling her fear, and slowly he smiled at her, evil and deadly, like the cats he resembled.

"Allow me one pleasure, will you Hassan, before we get on with this," Marrakeshi said, his eyes never leaving Elizabeth.

Hassan nodded once, and his smile deepening, the police inspector walked slowly toward her. She retreated before him, bumping into a table as she did so. She reached behind her to save herself from falling, and just as the slender, catlike Arab snaked his arms around her and brought his mouth down heavily on hers, her hand fell on something cold and hard. She grabbed it and swung down in a wide arc, the bronze book end thunking with a sickening sound onto the Arab's skull. She stood unmoving as his arms fell from her back, and he sank to the floor down the length of her body. He lay there, unconscious or dead, she was not sure, a fat worm of blood creeping out from between the tightly curled hair on his head onto the carpet.

Hassan had leapt up when he realised what she was going to do and they stared at each other over the body of the police inspector. Elizabeth felt her body trembling and she felt as if her knees would give out beneath her at any moment. She stepped

across the body and walked toward the couch and sat down, never for a moment taking her eyes off Hassan.

"That, you will find, will do you very little good, Elizabeth. I am not so stupid as Marrakeshi, nor such a prisoner of my lust," he said quietly.

"So it was you, all along. You who put the scorpion in my room and the poison in my milk. It was your man I saw in the hold of the ship on the way across. It was you listening on the extension in the study the night I talked to Maggie. You are contemptible," she spat at him.

"Yes, undoubtedly I am," he smiled, unperturbed. "And now, you see, you have forced me into an uncomfortable position. I shall have to kill you, as I had to kill Clare."

"Poor Jonathan. He knew, didn't he, that you had killed his mother?"

"Yes, he saw it happen. I didn't know, of course until later. But fear will close the mouth of almost any child," he said.

"That is what those dreams meant. What did you threaten him with? Whatever it was, he dreamt about it constantly, you vile beast."

"Simple. I threatened to cut his tongue out if he so much as murmured a word of what he had seen. I showed him the knife I would use. As I said, fear works wonders on children," he smiled,

the black hole of his mouth, shapeless, working like the vacuole in a microscopic animal Elizabeth had seen in a biology class.

"Aren't you even curious about what is going on here?" he asked.

"You are smuggling drugs. That much I know already," she said.

"Exactly right. It kept me in money for awhile, but my expenses, like anyone else's, keep growing. I need more money than mere smuggling can get me. So you see, I shall have to kill you and your friends and make it look like. . . ."

"I know, like an accident," she interrupted.

"Not at all, my dear. I am good at making death look like an accident. I have already proved that. This time I must make it look like murder, and I must make Hamilton look like the guilty party." He smiled triumphantly at her.

"I don't understand," she said.

"Well, it will be quite simple. My friend Marrakeshi, if you haven't killed him, and I'm sure you haven't—his head is hard as nails—will conduct an investigation into the murder and it will be clear from the evidence he collects, that Hamilton has run amok and killed all three of you. His money will then, once he is confined to an asylum or executed as he is sure to be, be mine!" he finished.

"Certainly you do not delude yourself enough to think that Hamilton has left you his money," she asked, incredulous.

"Of course not. But with Chase out of the way, I will inherit his position as guardian of the children and executor of Hamilton's will. Is that not clever?"

"You have thought of everything, haven't you?" she asked bitterly.

"Well, it is quite good for an emergency plan, I think. Until you appeared, I had planned merely to murder Hamilton, faking an accident with Marrakeshi's help. It was a much simpler plan, but numbers always complicate things."

Elizabeth sat dumbly on the couch, unable to say anything. She stared at the unconscious police inspector. He was not dead; she could see his chest rising and falling quite regularly.

"Aren't you in the least interested in how you are to die?" he asked.

"I am not such a ghoul as you are," she muttered.

"Well, it will give me pleasure to tell you and watch you squirm," he said, almost to himself.

She watched, struck motionless with horror, as he approached the couch. She stood up and tried to run toward the door, but he caught her by the arm and swung her around to face him. She saw

that while they were talking, he had pulled a pair of black kid gloves on. He placed his hands around her throat and smiling down at her said, "I will strangle you, slowly, slowly, so you know for most of the time that you are dying. Only at the very end will you lose consciousness."

And as his hands began to tighten around her throat, she raised her hands, screaming, and rake his face with her finger nails. He cried out in pain, but did not loosen his grip, and she kicked and struggled in his grip. She was about to lose her tenuous grip on consciousness, when suddenly his hands fell away and she saw him fly across the room as if hurled by a poltergeist.

A poltergeist indeed. Mustafa ben Youssef loomed in the darkness at her side, his big broken nose casting a huge shadow over the rest of his afce. She smiled weakly at him, and fell to the floor in a dead faint.

CHAPTER TWELVE

It was, according to everyone from Chase and Maggie to the American ambassador, the most beautiful wedding Tangier had seen in many years, and Elizabeth the most beautiful bride. Maggie and Chase had been matron of honor and best man, and only the four of them knew how close it had come to never taking place.

Elizabeth had woken up to the knowledge that she was being carried through the dark city. As the memory of the hours that had just past flooded her mind, a scream began to form in her throat. Who was this person in whose arms she was being borne?

"It's all right, dearest, you're safe at last," Hamilton's voice had calmed her. She sank back on his chest with relief and wondered tiredly who the black hulking shadow was that walked along silently beside Hamilton.

"Mustafa, of course. You saved my life," she murmured quietly and saw the huge Arab's strong white teeth gleam in a smile in the darkness.

Hamilton swung open the front gate of his house and carried her through the garden and up the outside stairs to the terrace outside her bedroom. The french doors were open and she could see Fatima flitting about the lighted room in a swirl of colorful petticoats, turning down the bed, laying out her night gown, adjusting the lamp shade so that only a soft light fell on the bed. She smiled to herself at the Arab woman's silent bustlings as Hamilton placed her on the bed.

"I'll be back in ten minutes to say good night. You get into your nightclothes," he ordered.

She obediently stood up and began to unbutton her blouse and allowed Fatima to push her hands away and complete the task for her. Once in her night gown, Fatima led her into the bathroom, placed a toothbrush and toothpaste in her hands and stood by watching her as she mechanically performed the preparations for going to bed. She was then lead back to bed and gently covered.

She was all but asleep, never having really emerged from the fog of her faint when Hamilton appeared in the doorway, smiling gently at her. He walked to the side of her bed, bent down and kissed her gently on the lips and on each eyelid and tiptoed from the room. She lay with her eyes shut, listening to his footsteps retreating down the stairs to the living room, enjoying the feeling of

security that all the attention had given her. she shuddered once at the memory of Hassan, his hands at her throat, a mad gleam in his eyes, and that of Marrakeshi lying silent on the floor bleeding into the carpet. With a kind of sleepy effort of will, she pushed that picture from her mind and replaced it with one of Hamilton standing in the doorway. She snuggled deeper into the bed, turned over on one side and was about to fall asleep when she sat bolt upright, anger searing her mind, her eyes wide open.

She leapt out of bed and slammed her arms into the sleeves of her bathrobe, and tying it hastily about herself, flung wide the door of her bedroom. She regretted the silence imposed on the fixtures of the house by its very richness. Doors did not slam in the house, then open quietly, no matter what the force exerted on them. She stalked down the stairs, wishing she had shoes on so her stamping feet would make some noise. Somehow the ineffectual slapping of her bare feet on the tile stairs so infuriated her that she was not sure she would be able to speak as she stalked into the living room.

"You utter and unspeakable beast," she spat at Hamilton, her eyes blazing.

"I'm surprised it took this long," he said gently, smiling sheepishly at her.

"You're safe dearest, at last," she flung Lis own words back at him, her voice brimming with scorn.

"Now Elizabeth, let me explain," he pleaded, his hands outstretched toward her as if to ward off her angry words.

"Now Lizzie! Calm down," Maggie's voice cut into her anger.

"Maggs," she cried joyfully. "Are you all right? How did you get off the ship? Did they hurt you?" Her questions tumbled out as she ran across the room to embrace her friend.

"Well, about an hour after you escaped," Maggie began, her eyes blinking with excitement, "there was a terrific commotion in the corridor, and the door burst open, and this huge man in an absolutely enormous brown jalaba rushed in. He said, 'Do not be afraid, Madame. You are saved.' and grabbed me by the hand and started yanking me across the cabin. When he saw I'd hurt my ankle, he actually carried me off the ship and into a car and then we drove for awhile and then he carried me the rest of the way here." Maggie babbled excitedly, the words rushing out of her mouth.

"He got around tonight, didn't he?" Elizabeth said, her voice tinged with sarcasm. "What happened to Ahmed and his cohorts?"

"Of cohorts he did not seem to have any," Mustafa's deep voice rumbled from the depths of

a chair. "I locked him in a hold before bearing this lady to this house."

"That certainly is more forethought than a lot of people around here have been exhibiting lately," Elizabeth said, narrowing her eyes at Hamilton.

"Elizabeth, really! How can we expect to make a success of our marriage if you continue to distrust me so completely?" he asked, a tinge of humor in his eyes.

"Marriage! You have the gall to think that I will marry you after this? I won't spend another night in this house!" she shrieked.

"Lizzie, honestly! I don't see what you're so upset about. I mean we did get saved and Hamilton isn't a dope smuggler or a murderer and now you can get married and live happily ever after," Maggie said, her eyes big with amazement.

"You were never really in a moment's danger, you know," Chase injected.

"Never in a moment's danger?" Elizabeth shrieked. "What about the scorpion in my bedroom and the poison in my milk?" she demanded, her eyes blazing at Hamilton.

"The scorpion, my dear, was an unfortunate accident, a thing over which I had no control. The poison in your milk was only enough to make you sick. Hassan has admitted to trying to frighten

you away with that trick. Another attempt to poison you was made that I don't think you even realised," he said.

"When, what do you mean?" she asked, more quietly.

"The night Chase and Maggie arrived. Your white wine was full of arsenic, I had it analysed. If you will recall, when you started to drink the second glass, I threw it into the bushes. Only the second glass had been poisoned, you see. It was then that I knew that Ahmed was involved," Hamilton explained quietly.

"I remember that. When the meat course was served, Lizzie somehow ended up with a second glass of white wine," Maggie said excitedly.

"Elizabeth, dear, I don't mean to try to minimize the danger or the unpleasantness of the scorpion incident or of the poison in your milk, but Chase is right. Except for those occurences, you were never in a moment's danger," he said.

"How can you say that? I was almost killed tonight," she said, angrily.

"I can say that because you were being followed every moment you were out of this house from the day you arrived. There was never a chance that you could be taken without my knowledge of who had done it and where you had been taken," he said.

"What did he look like, this man who followed me?" she asked.

"Sometimes, Elizabeth, it was I, following you about the streets as stealthily and silently as a djini," Mustafa spoke quietly again from the depths of his chair.

"And sometimes it was a tiny Arab," Hamilton continued.

"In a navy blue jalaba!" Elizabeth said triumphantly. "I knew he was following me, he kept poopping up places I was. I never saw you though, Mustafa," she added.

"So you see, my dear," Hamilton began.

"Just a moment, Hamilton, there are still a few things I'm unclear about. What were you doing in that tea cafe this afternoon with Marrakeshi?" Elizabeth interrupted.

"Oh, that was entirely unconnected, dear. I was informing him of your plans to stay in Tangier as my wife and arranging for the necessary police papers to be sent to the house. It could have been done by telephone, but I met him in the street and it seemed expedient," Hamilton said smiling.

"Oh. Well, I still think you're absolutely beastly and my plans to stay here in Tangier have definitely changed. I guess you may as well send the papers back. By the way, how is Marrakeshi?" she asked.

"He is in the hospital with a severe concussion and fractured skull. That was some knock you gave him. He will live, at any rate, to stand trial for blackmail, drug traffic and for being an accessory to murder," Hamilton said.

"You know about all that then," she said.

"Yes. You see, my dear, I have suspected Hassan of killing Clare for some time. The problem was to force him to reveal himself," Hamilton said.

"And you used me, *used* me, to do that for you," she said incredulous.

"I'm afraid I must take credit for that idea, my dear," Mustafa said, quietly.

"You. But why?"

"Hamilton and I have been trying to force Hassan to, how is it you say, show us his hand? Yes, for some time. We could have had him in the jail for smuggling of drugs many times. But in the matter of the murder he was too clever for us. So, when you came to Tangier, I suggested to Hamilton that you could be made to seem a threat to Hassan and he would be forced, eventually, to show us his hand," the big Arab said.

"He was not so clever as you seem to think, you know. There was an eye witness," Elizabeth said.

"One moment. I am not yet through with my confession. Our friendship almost was sundered

because of my suggestion. We fought bitterly for the first time since I have known Hamilton. He did not want to put you in that danger. However, I prevailed upon him to see that until Hassan was caught, your life was in constant peril anyway, and that it would be much more clever to be in control of that peril ourselves and thus be able to protect you. It was with the greatest difficulty and much shouting that I convinced him of my rightness," Mustafa said.

"That's what I overheard you fighting about that night on the phone," Elizabeth said.

"What night was that, Elizabeth," Hamilton said.

"The night I discovered your concubine," she answered and laughed for the first time since she had entered the room. "I found what must have been Clare's sitting room, and picked up the phone to see if it was connected, and you were fighting in Arabic with Mustafa."

"What did you mean when you said there had been an eyewitness to Clare's murder?" Hamilton asked.

"Well, Hassan told me that Jonathan saw him push his mother over the cliff, and that he kept the boy silent by threatening to cut out his tongue if he so much as thought about telling anyone," she answered seriously.

"That unspeakable bastard. Well, his fate caught him up in the end. He was stabbed with a Moroccan dagger before the police got to him. His wife," Hamilton said, grimly. "He must have led her an awful life."

"To deal with a child like that. It's disgusting," Maggie wailed. "He deserved killing, if ever anyone did," she added.

"Elizabeth, I would like to go upstairs and explain to the child that he no longer has anything to fear from Hassan, but I would also like to be able to tell both of them that we are going to be married," Hamilton said.

"Well, as usual, I seem to have made a fool of myself before I entirely understood the situation," Elizabeth said.

"Does that mean that you're not going to stalk out into the night in your bathrobe, never to return?" Hamilton asked, chiding her gently.

He arose and walked toward her, and lifting her up from her chair, he folded her in his arms and said, "Say yes, Elizabeth, please."

"Yes, Hamilton. I will stay. I never really believed I was capable of leaving really," she laughed and laid her head on his chest.

"Why don't you come up with me while I tell them?" he asked.

"I think this news is a thing they should hear from you alone," she said.

"Well, I'll bring them down later to say good night," he said as he walked toward the stairs.

"Maggie, I've just had a terrific idea. We've made no plans yet for a honeymoon, but I'm sure we'll spend it aboard the Fer de Lance. Why don't you come with us?" Elizabeth said.

"We couldn't do that. What fun is a honeymoon with another couple along," Maggie said.

"Well, I'm sure we'll be taking Matthew and Jonathan with us, and that boat is big enough for eight couples to honeymoon on in complete privacy," she said.

"What do you think Chase?" Maggie asked, her excitement at the prospect evident.

"Well, I don't know, Maggs. I've got a job to get back to, you know," he said frowning.

"I know. We could take you back to Boston. Oh, come on you two. Say yes. It's a beautiful trip, and then from Boston Hamilton and I and the kids could go down to Bermuda or Jamaica," Elizabeth wheedled.

"Well, that's an idea worth considering," Chase mused.

"Then it's settled!" Elizabeth said and winked at Maggie conspiratorially.

Elizabeth awoke three days later on the morning of her wedding to a clear blue sky and the muezzin singing out the morning call to prayer. She lay in bed and looked through the open French doors into the garden and the sky above. A flock of swallows wheeled gracefully above the palm tree, flew straight up in the air and suddenly began the steep, breathtaking dive straight at the earth which is characteristic of their flight. Although she had witnessed this performance many times, Elizabeth held her breath until the birds had pulled safely out of their dive and were once more wheeling and circling above the palm.

Solomon and Sheba lay against her side, purring and watching the birds too. A quiet, but imperious miaow brought Solomon to attention, and with a single leap he was off the bed and sitting beside a wicker basket at the foot. Natasha appeared walking through the door into the garden. Elizabeth laughed. She had forgotten that Natasha and her babies had been moved into her room due to the babysitter situation.

Solomon had assumed that it was not only his right but his duty to oversee the care and rearing of the six blue-gray kittens which lay in the basket. It had caused him great anguish when Natasha had summoned him in the middle of the night to watch them while she took a break. He had been

torn between his duty to his adopted children and to Elizabeth. So, Hamilton had moved the newborn kittens into Elizabeth's room to make Solomon's burden easier to bear.

Elizabeth watched as he sat attentively beside the basket, his blue eyes following the tiny grey kittens' every move. Sheba sat on the foot of the bed and regarded Elizabeth with a glance that seemed to say, "Isn't he an old fool?"

"You're just jealous, young lady," she said to Sheba as she lit her first cigarette of the day. She lay back against the pillows, smoke drifting from her nostrils, and let her thoughts wander over the day's events.

Jonathan, who was a changed child since his uncle's arrest, and Matthew were to be ring bearers, Chase was best man, Maggie matron of honor, and Mustafa ben Youssef was going to give the bride away. He had never participated in a Christian wedding before and his excitement was a joy to behold. He had been the hit of the rehearsal the night before, walking Elizabeth down the "aisle" in the garden as if he had been delivering a raving lunatic to an asylum.

"Mustafa, this is supposed to be a slow, dignified walk, not a quick, hustling along," she had

"I do not mean to hustle anybody along," he had answered. "But I have heard of what Chris-

tians call the leaving in the lurch. I do not want to be responsible if you leave Hamilton in the lurch."

She had calmed his fears, and the next time they ran through the ceremony, Mustafa had been the very image. caricature was more truly descriptive she thought, of dignity, his huge intricately crooked nose raised high in the air, his jalaba swaying gently as he walked.

"What is all this daydreaming, young lady, the hair dresser's here," Maggie cried bursting into the room.

"I forgot about that. Does he have a dryer and everything with him?" she asked, putting her robe on.

"You bet. He looks as if he's been summoned to arrange the locks of the Sultan's chief wife," Maggie giggled.

Two hours later, Maggie surveyed the results of the hair dresser's labors and nodded her approval. Elizabeth was very pleased herself. Her hair had been swept up smoothly in a loose French twist, all except one lock which curled down from the back to hang over her shoulder. She looked elegant, almost like Marie Antoinette she thought.

Maggie was already dressed in a blue silk floor length gown with tiny cap sleeves and scooped neckline and a generous skirt falling from an em-

pire waist. A tiny blue Juliet cap embroidered with pearls finished the costume.

"Come on, Lizzie, it'll take Fatima and me an hour to button you into that dress and the guests are already arriving. You should see the American ambassador. He's gorgeous and tan with white hair and he's wearing a swallowtail coat. Hamilton looks absolutely handsome and of course so does Chase. But I won't tell you about Mustafa. He's too wonderful for words."

Maggie continued to rattle on at her as she slipped into the long white silk slip and fastened her stockings before stepping into the white satin shoes. She put a chiffon scarf over her hair and with Maggie's help, slipped the dress on over her head without messing her hair. Fatima approached, her smile glittering with gold teeth, a button hook in hand, and within ten minutes, Elizabeth had been buttoned in.

She placed the antique lace mantilla on her head, its scalloped edges framing her face gently. It had belonged to Hamilton's great grandmother. She stood back and surveyed herself. She was radiant. The white velvet dress, an Arabic caftan with slight moderations, was beautiful. High necked with narrow long sleeves, it nipped in under her bosom, and fell from there in gentle folds to

the floor. The back had been cunningly constructed so that its fullness produced the effect of a train. The seed pearl embroidery of roses on the sleeves and neck and hem was exquisite.

"Do the servants know that the gates are to be thrown open when the reception starts?" Elizabeth asked Fatima. It was an Arab custom that when the bride was delivered to the house of the bridegroom, the doors were thrown open to anyone who cared to attend the feasting and merrymaking. Elizabeth had thought this a charming custom and intended to keep it.

"Oui, Madame."

"Good. Then, I guess I'm ready. Oh. Maggie, I'm so happy," she said, feeling tears behind her eyes.

"I know you are, sweetie, but save those tears for the reception," she said. Maggie embraced her quickly and kissed her on the cheek.

They stepped out onto the terrace. and Maggie gave a signal. A moment later, a light knock was heard at the door, and Fatima opened it. There, looming in the doorway was Mustafa, resplendent in a magnificent white wool jalaba.

"This is a wedding jalaba. Regard the decoration around the hood and the tassle at the point of the hood," he said solemnly turning around for

their inspection. "I am all right then for the giving away of the bride?" he asked anxiously.

"You couldn't be more perfect, Mustafa," Elizabeth said smiling at him. "After all, you saved my life. Who is more qualified to give it into the keeping of the man I love?"

They stepped onto the terrace again and walked down the steps into the garden. As they reached the center of the aisle of chairs that had been set up there, the first stains of Mendelssohn began. Through the music Elizabeth sought out the calm, warm blue eyes of Hamilton as he stood beside Chase, watching her progress down the aisle. Here I come, my love, she thought.

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